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PREVAILING WINDS

PREVAILING WINDS

BY

MARGARET AYER BARNES

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1932

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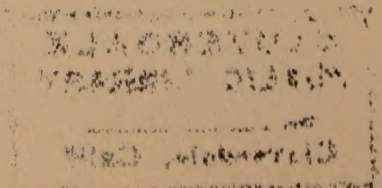

A SAINT CHRISTOPHE
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Is it as plainly in our living shown
By slant and twist, which way the wind hath blown?

ADELAIDE CRAPSEY

On Seeing Weatherbeaten Trees

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

THE short story is a form of literature unpopular today with the book-reading public. In spite of the tremendous demand on the part of the magazine editors not only for the short story, but for the short short story — the direct descendant of the French *conte*, tabloid tales which can be told in from one to three thousand words — the average publisher will tell the average writer who turns up in his sanctum with a manuscript composed of eight or ten separate stories that such a collection will not sell in book form. The writer, himself, seldom takes the short story seriously. It is too often for him a get-rich-quick scheme — a ready-money device. If his talents lie in that direction, a clever writer can toss off a short story in from one to six weeks and sell it immediately to a magazine for an excellent price. In magazine form, however, its fame will be ephemeral, at best a thirty days' wonder, and the chances are slight, unless it falls under the searching eye and pleases the catholic taste of Mr. E. J. H. O'Brien, that it will ever be published in book form, arouse the interest of the critics, or contribute in any way to the writer's serious reputation as a man of letters. With some rare exceptions, as in the case of

Katherine Mansfield, serious reputations in the field of fiction today have been founded on novels. The short story, no matter how excellent technically, is considered unimportant, a moment's ornament, a mere hundred-yard dash in the track meet of letters. The book-reading public is more interested in the Marathons.

Nevertheless, the art of the short story, originating in France and adopted by the Russians, has been successfully developed by many English-writing novelists. Robert Louis Stevenson, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Mr. John Galsworthy, Miss Willa Cather, Mrs. Edith Wharton, Mr. Ernest Hemingway, and many others have made brilliant contributions to this field. It is a field which no artist and no technician could consider unimportant, because it is a field in which art and technique rule supreme. A sense of form, rigidly observed, is essential in a good short story. The mechanical limitations of time and space eliminate the elbow-room in which to make mistakes. For this reason, possibly, it appealed originally to the great French writers, such men as Mérimée and Flaubert and De Maupassant, because the sense of form is essentially a classic tradition and the Latins take naturally to classicism, tending to subordinate, or at least to equalize, the importance of matter to manner in everything that they write.

Modern novels, on the contrary, are apt to stress

subject matter at the expense of form. Some of them are written as loosely and as flexibly as life itself is lived. They offer a writer a medium that is ampler and freer and less technically exacting than that of the short story. They give him space in which to meditate, irrelevantly, on his theories of life. Ideally speaking, of course, irrelevancies have no place in any form of art. But in the course of three hundred odd pages a novelist with a turn for philosophy usually takes time to linger in the primrose paths of dalliance with his ideas. *Cul de sacs* those paths may be, but they often contribute materially to the richness of the texture of his tapestry and to the atmosphere of leisurely, realistic reflection in which his tale is told.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, however, 'So far as literature imitates at all, it imitates not life, but speech; not the facts of human destiny, but the emphasis and the suppression with which the human actor tells of them.' Emphasis and suppression are the two great factors in short-story writing. The story of a life may be poignantly told in five thousand words, if the proper facts are emphasized and suppressed. Economy of detail, the elimination of the superfluous, and the scrupulous cherishing of the essential are the problems which the writer of short stories has to face. He must study with care the significance of what he has to tell and the manner in which he means to tell it. He must

weigh the value of his material on jeweler's scales and, never forgetting that he has no time to lose, he must choose the precise moment at which his story should begin. The opening sentence must immediately arrest the reader's attention and every phrase of description, every line of dialogue to follow must carry its load in the unraveling of his plot. Whether that plot is concerned with character or incident, every irrelevant comment must be cut from the manuscript, every stroke of his pen must be necessary to elucidate his theme. When his pen strokes are unnecessary he must stoically resist the temptation to admire his penmanship and cross them out with firmness. He must throw the cargo overboard to save the ship.

This does not mean, of course, that short stories are inevitably written hurriedly or impatiently. On the contrary a vast amount of time and thought and reflection are necessary to condense and yet vitalize a theme. The unities of time and place and point of view must be carefully considered before they are either adopted or abandoned. A single incident or interview that takes place in ten minutes may be chosen for a story, yet, through the use of revery or introspection, lighting up the years that are past or the years that are to come, that incident or interview may illustrate the course of an entire life. It all comes back to the skillful use of emphasis and suppression. And the skillful use of

emphasis and suppression is a delicate task that may well put any artist on his mettle.

This collection of short stories represents my first attempt at the writing of fiction. Originally published four years ago, most of them were written while I was recovering from a broken back and other assorted fractures after a motor accident in France. I wrote the first of them for my own amusement with no thought of publication and if it had not been for that accident they would never have been written. For that reason I dedicated the book 'À Saint Christophe, Patron des Voyageurs,' in grateful recognition of the fact that the patron saint of the traveler, when he staged that head-on collision on the road from Rouen to Paris, arranged what was, for me at least, an important sequence of cause and effect.

One thing leads to another in life and, if the motor accident led to the publication of these short stories, they, in their turn, led to my subsequent excursions into the field of the novel, where I luxuriated in the elbow-room in which to make mistakes and experiment with irrelevant ideas. Many of the stories, were, technically speaking, harder to write than the one hundred and seventy thousand words of my first novel. And in all of them I shall always feel a peculiarly warm and personal interest, representing, as they do, my first effort to recreate in written words the conclusions I had drawn from life

itself. All writers will agree, I think, that they began to write with a first fine careless rapture which they subsequently lost in their increasing realization of the magnitude of the writer's task. Thinking for the first time about the construction of these stories taught me more about the writing of fiction than I shall ever be wise or skillful enough to put into practice. To begin to try to write is to hitch one's wagon to a star. And nothing is more exciting than that, whether or no anything much ever comes of it.

I know, at any rate, how hard it is to write a short story. And that is perhaps why I feel that the art of short-story writing should receive more recognition than it does from the book-reading public and that discerning readers of fiction should turn their attention occasionally from the solid endurance test of the Marathons to applaud the technical distinction in the vivid achievement of the light-foot lads who go in for the hundred-yard dash.

MARGARET AYER BARNES

NOTE

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the editors of *The Pictorial Review*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *The Red Book*, where these stories were first printed.

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PREVAILING WINDS

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HOME FIRE

PREVAILING WINDS

HOME FIRE

How did she manage to do it on the alimony? That was Philip Mayne's first thought on reëntering Marion's little drawing-room and taking his familiar stand before the smouldering fire. Nine years since he'd seen it. It wasn't the same drawing-room, of course. Very different, this little apartment parlor, in all essential respects, from their old suburban living-room. Then, he'd had his job in the bank. Now, her slender share of his fluctuating income as an erratic journalist and critic couldn't take her very far.

But Marion had always been thrifty. And the atmosphere of the two rooms was strangely alike. There were the books, hers and her father's, lining the walls from floor to ceiling, their red and brown, their green and gold bindings decorating the room like the warm, blended tints of some old tapestry. There were the nine daffodils — Marion would have nine, of course, neither six nor an even dozen — in the glass bowl on the piano. He knew where the other

three were. He knew as well as if he'd seen them. In Marion's bedroom, on her dressing-table, in the little silver vase he'd given her the Christmas they were first engaged. The idea, then, had been that he would always keep it filled with one perfect rose. He hadn't, long, of course, but Marion had nearly always managed to find a posy for it. Yes. The other three would be there.

There was the old Arundel print over the fireplace. Botticelli's wistful Aphrodite on her fluted shell, drifting uncertainly ashore from her cold, green sea to meet unknown, unsought desire in the leafy woods. Not his idea of Venus. Never had been. But Marion had always loved her. She claimed the newborn goddess would have looked like that. She had as much to learn from men as they from her. A wistful Aphrodite, thought Philip with a little twisted smile, was a more appropriate patron to preside over the interview before him than any more urgent goddess. He felt old and wise and infinitely disillusioned. Wistfulness exactly described the quality of his feeling toward Marion. A timid, tender yearning toward belated reunion that was practically untouched by passion. He had put the illusion that was love behind him forever.

'Mrs. Mayne asks you to wait,' said the maid on the threshold. Philip sank nervously into his old armchair and suppressed a restless gesture toward his waistcoat pocket. He'd like a cigarette. Perhaps a Lucky'd bring him luck. But no — one didn't smoke

a casual fag at a moment like this. Waiting to see one's former wife after an interval of nine long years. Not in her very parlor. Waiting. And hoping that she'd take him back.

Yes. Everything was surprisingly the same. But it wasn't just the objects in the room, vaguely familiar as they all were to him. It wasn't even the faint breath of Marion's favorite perfume that hung reminiscently in the circumambient air. It was something much less tangible than any of these things. A manner of drawing the armchairs cozily around the tiny hearth, of placing the lamps on tables just where you'd want the light, of planting cigarettes where they came easily to hand, of setting the little scene for comfort and intimacy and confidential talk, that was somehow his former wife in its very essence.

Nice, it would be to have a home again. A home — like this. The nostalgia born of the haphazard years spent casually in impersonal club bedrooms and barren bachelor flats welled up in Philip's heart. Why had he wearied of it all before?

He hadn't wearied, really, of his home, but of the dull routine on which it all depended. Leaving the bank each day at half-past four. Catching the five-fifteen. Reading the 'Evening Star,' with other bankers. The bankers' train, it was. Lucky to get it. Lawyers and business men caught the fifty-five. No one but he had thought it was absurd. Coming in again on the eight-nine. Reading the 'Morning Sun,'

with other bankers. Lawyers and business men on the seven-fifty. Good Lord, what a life! Bar the ten months in Oklahoma that had been his war, he had endured it for five mortal years. Because of Marion. It had seemed heaven when he took it on at twenty-four, unwitting victim of the biologic urge toward marriage!

What hadn't he hoped for when Marion said she'd marry him? Her great brown eyes, her scarlet petal of a mouth, her slender, tremulous hands, had seemed to promise all the heart of man could desire. He'd been so sure that he could teach her love. He had, of course. She'd loved him, in her way. That he knew. She'd brought two babies into the world. What had gone wrong between them? Was it just that marriage couldn't be romance? Illusion vanished when dreams became reality?

Well — he'd try to make it go, this time. If she would take him back. Perhaps he could. Hope sprang eternal, thought Philip, the critic, with a detached smile for the riddles of the human heart. Somehow, in ceasing to be reality, Marion had become once more a dream. Couldn't he persuade her to let him try again?

It wouldn't be too easy. For Marion was an uncompromising idealist. The last woman in the world to understand how man could slip and fall. Mistress of her emotions, always. His happy-go-lucky attitude toward life had always startled her. She had to stop

and think and talk things out. He was content to feel. On the road to emotional fulfillment they had always tripped and stumbled over differences in thought. With all her humor she was essentially serious. Full of illusions on human conduct, but unsustained, when it came to the personal pinch, by his cynical sympathy for the foolish frailties of poor mortality. Wandering, always, in a world of dreams. Pathetic, too, with the childlike pathos of all idealists caught in a world of compromise. Not happy, he was sure.

But happiness, as viewed at twenty-four, was more than one asked of life at thirty-seven. The glow of romance had faded, but surely he could kindle the flame of sentiment on the domestic hearth. The serenity of a Darby and Joan existence, together, with the children, was theirs for the taking. The children were his talking point. Surely she'd think of them. They must have meant a lot to her, of course. Since her father's death, especially. Curious, he'd thought of them so seldom. Well — he'd been a busy man. Babies they were that day he went away, so little thinking that he'd not come back. Big children now. Philip glanced eagerly about the room, rising once more to his feet on the hearthrug. She must have pictures of them, somewhere about.

There was the boy, in that gold frame beside the daffodils. Philip approached the picture with a flutter beneath the waistcoat that surprised his dis-

illusioned self. Attractive lad — but just like his mother's people. His grandfather, the old professor, all over again. At sixty-five the dear old gentleman had kept just that look of childlike candor. The boy liked his boarding-school. Marion had written that, in thanking him for his offer to take over the payment of the child's tuition. Curious to think that was his son. He'd never thought of how he'd look. A boy, in tweeds, with freckles, and a wide, disarming grin.

No pictures of the girl about. She was at home, of course. She would be ten in April. A little girl. With fluttering petticoats above bare knees. In pigtails. Or in curls. Or with the sleek, cropped head that children now affected. A small daughter. Appealing thought! Philip checked his tender speculation with a derisive smile. Checked also, a second time, that instinctive gesture toward his waistcoat pocket. And moved again toward the fire. Moodily he kicked the crumbling log. It fell asunder in a shower of sparks. Was he turning sentimentalist after all these years? Well, it was a sentimental situation. You couldn't get away from that. Though his own approach to it had been practical enough.

Stupid — to stay apart. That had been his thought. Just stupid, when the flame that had separated them had so long ago died down to feathery ashes. Even the ashes no longer remained between them. The various winds of doctrine, blowing through his breezy life, had long since whirled away

the last of them. What had it been but a blaze of excelsior at best? Hot and brilliant enough for the moment it lasted. More exciting than the smouldering embers on a domestic hearthstone. But not a conflagration, in retrospect, to be taken seriously.

Well, he'd never done that. Not even at the time. He could reassure Marion on that point. Letty's place in the scheme of things had always been quite clear to him. But he had been a fool. Plenty of other men would have managed the whole affair more quietly. Would have had their cake and eaten it too. It was a phase he had passed through. But he might have passed through it with less uproar. He saw that now quite clearly.

Letty was but a symbol of the general revolt of the period. He had gone in for Letty in the giddy intoxication of having escaped the bank, of having discovered a new world, his world, the one he was made for. If it hadn't been for that play he'd written, he might have been a vice-president of the Midland Loan and Trust Company that minute! After nine years, the sense of escape was still vividly with him. God, how he'd hated that bank! And then — his play! The key to freedom! A fluke! Tossed off in a summer holiday! He'd never done another that had run a week. But that one had sufficed. It had unlocked the door of the Midland's vault, it had carried him to New York to supervise rehearsals, and, thanks to Letty, bewitching little actress that she was, it had

run for three delirious years while he found firm footing in journalistic circles and acquired recognition among the intelligentsia of his generation.

Letty had just happened, as it were, on the side. Effulgent Letty, so blonde and so beautiful, picked from the chorus by that inspired Jew, his manager, to play his glittering heroine, with what unerring witchery and distinction! Before the rehearsals were half under way he had fallen a victim to her childlike charm. He had been young and careless. By the time his play had run a month, they were notorious on Broadway, where such notoriety is not too easy to achieve. Well, if he'd made her a star, she'd made him a journalist. Burned the last bridges between him and return to the bank. Notorious rakes are not the stuff of which vice-presidents are made! Letty had literally ferried him across the Rubicon. And he was correspondingly grateful. She was playing Juliet, now, in London, the divorced wife of a British peer. He'd plucked her from the chorus, but she'd saved him from the Midland Loan and Trust Company. The affair was long over, and the obligations, thought Philip with a grin, were mutual.

Marion had never argued. But she had divorced him. Discreetly and decently, with every possible consideration for his feelings and his reputation. She had gone back with the babies to her old father, the astronomer, on the university campus, and waited those two years required by Illinois law to prove desertion.

He had stayed in New York. At first for Letty, and then for fun, and, finally, because it was the place to stay if you were interested in writing. It was the place, preëminently, where things happened. Things of the mind, at least. It had seemed to him, fresh from the mental stagnation of the Midland Loan and Trust Company, a great adventure of the intellect to live there. He had never quite lost that early sense of glitter that was really gold. Of careless, lavish luxury all around him, and freedom to think unquestioned, the thoughts that popped up, unbidden, in the mind. That was what New York had always meant to him — ideas rampant, on a field d'or! Of course, to be fair, there *were* bankers on Wall Street. But, thank God, he didn't know them!

Marion would like New York. If she'd consent to live with him again. She loved ideas. Generated her own, too, and clung to them a trifle tenaciously. But very good ones they always were. Would she consent? She must be thinking of it, since she let him come. Why *didn't* she show up? Nervous work — this waiting. Marion was never late. Could she be nervous too? Good sign or bad? Surely she would at least consider what he had to say. What would he say? He hadn't thought it out. Discuss the children soberly, of course. She'd have them on her mind. And tell her, honestly enough, thank God, she was the only woman that he'd really loved. That was, of course, what she would want to hear.

A footfall in the passage whirled him about on the hearthrug. And there she was in the doorway. Marion! But how different! Really, how very different! Not any older. Younger, in fact. But not at all the same. It was the style, of course, absurdly suited to her slender figure. He hadn't thought that she would change like that. That cropped brown head, that awkward, boyish grace! The short red frock, long ear-rings, cordial smile! She stepped to the hearthrug and held out her hand.

'Sit down, Phil dear, and have a cigarette. Don't look so scared!' Her voice was just the same. He had forgotten it. That soft contralto note that faltered to a laugh. She sat, herself, beneath the golden lamp. 'Put on another log. Tea'll soon be here. Or will you have a drink? I'm sure you've lots to say.'

He had. But somehow nothing would come out. He gazed, as in a spell. This, then, was what he'd thrown away. His wife. She must be thirty-six. She didn't look within ten years as old. Younger than when he'd left her. But it was the style. With a devastating sense of his own gray hairs and a total forgetfulness of his lean, cadaverous charm, Philip clung desperately to that assuaging thought. And yes — it *was*. For even in the mellow glow of golden lamplight, her face, itself, was older. The great brown eyes a tiny shade more gaunt. The mouth a scarlet petal no longer. Emphasized with a stroke of artificial red, that cleverly matched the wine shade of

her gown, it seemed a quivering wound, now that she'd ceased to smile. It *did* quiver. Marion was nervous, too. She passed the cigarettes across the hearthrug. The slender, tremulous hands were unchanged. She wore his wedding ring. His heart leaped up as he noticed it.

'You're — looking well.' She broke the little pause.

'I'm awfully gray.'

'What's the odds, since you're a man? It's most becoming. You look distinguished, Phil. You *are* distinguished. I should congratulate you. I always read your stuff.'

'Does it amuse you?'

'Yes. It's so like you. It's kept me — well — in touch.'

She had the advantage of him there, he thought. In touch was just what he wasn't! How little he knew about her life! Pleasant, it must have been. She'd stayed so young and pretty. Full of — experience. Other men, of course. He hadn't thought of them. All her old campus beaux. And new ones, too. That fellow in the archæology department, who taught for the love of it. He was quite a boy! A packer's son. With leisure on his hands. He'd always hung about Marion's tea-table. She must have had her adventures. Absurd of him to think he'd find her, as he was himself, bored with a life emotionally void. Still intrigued with the past. But yet, she'd never married. He'd take a plunge.

'You know, of course, you're prettier than ever?'

'Now, that's disarming of you, Phil! Of course I don't believe it!'

'How could you stay so young?'

She lit her cigarette before she spoke. Quite calmly. But her voice was faintly shaken with emotion.

'It's living makes us old. I haven't — lived much.'

'You haven't — lived?'

'Not really, Phil. Not lived a life like yours. I've existed in a state of suspended animation. Rather like Snow-White in her glass casket. Father was the seven little dwarfs rolled into one. He took beautiful care of me. But the campus was very like the enchanted forest. It wasn't life.'

'The Prince never entered?'

'Well — he never broke the casket!' She laughed a little unsteadily. 'Princes can't be what they once were! I've never found them all they're cracked up to be.'

'And yet you let me in?'

'Perhaps I didn't understand your rôle. Have you come,' she asked, naïvely, her gravity belied by a latent twinkle, 'in the capacity of Prince Charming?'

'Marion,' he said, 'I've come to make amends. I've come in all humility to ask you to forgive me. Do you think you can?'

She looked at him quite gravely before she spoke.

'I think there's nothing, really, to forgive.'

'You mean — you *have* forgiven?'

At this she went to the heart of the matter at once. With characteristic candor. No beating about the bush.

'One can't help love. It strikes one. Or it doesn't. Like lightning.'

'Yes,' said Philip doubtfully, determined to match her generosity with his own. 'But one needn't court the thunderbolt by walking abroad in the storm.' Facing her wide, attentive eyes he felt a slight embarrassment. He smiled disarmingly and took refuge in a note of levity. 'I rather forsook my lightning rod, you know. I might have been more particular about my — insulation.'

'I don't think that,' said Marion quite firmly. 'When we love, we love. Some of us more than once. And we can't help it. Here comes your tea. You won't have a cocktail?'

'Thanks, no,' said Philip. Though perhaps he needed one. He felt strangely shaken.

'You take your tea the same?' He nodded gravely. The little maid had left the room. Marion laughed up at him over the poised sugar tongs. 'Oh, Phil, my dear! Can't you smile? It *is* a little funny! Dropping in the same three lumps after all the years!'

He laughed at that. And resumed his seat in the armchair.

'More things than the three lumps are just the same,' he said.

'But some are very different. I'm very different, Phil. I hope I've come to understand. I've thought a lot. And suffered. As you have yourself.'

Stirring his tea, Philip discreetly reviewed his past for signs of suffering. His few Byronic moments in the throes of the Letty incident seemed in retrospect hardly worthy of the name. Aside from them he had passed nine busy, interesting, if latterly somewhat lonely, years. He felt a bit ashamed. It *was* a man-made world. Women always drew the short straw in the lottery of the emotions. Marion *had* suffered. You could see it in her eyes. And in that different mouth.

'My dear,' he said, 'I haven't suffered as you think. My suffering is still ahead of me. It's waiting for me around the corner in case you turn me down.'

She was looking at him steadily.

'Just what have you come to ask of me?' she said.

She seemed terribly self-possessed. Mistress of herself and the situation. Disconcertingly adequate. Somehow withdrawn into her brittle, brilliant shell of modern fashion. But she intrigued him as never before. He looked long into her wide brown eyes. Glimpsed there, he thought, for a moment, before her gaze fell before his own, the faltering ghost of the old Marion, softened, victimized, delivered into his hands, perhaps, by the potent spell of their mutual memories.

'Remarriage,' he answered gently.

'Aren't you a bit — abrupt?'

'It seems abrupt to you. Impertinent, perhaps. But not to me. I've thought of it so long.' He rose and tossed his half-smoked Lucky in the fire. He was in for it now. He stood looking down at her from the hearthrug. The battle was on. He'd stand or fall by what he'd find to say. He'd fire his big gun at the start.

'Marion,' he said, 'you are the only woman that I've ever loved.'

She frowned and put her tea-cup down.

'Oh, Phil! You needn't say that to me! Really, you needn't! I'd rather you didn't. You can be quite honest. I'm sure I'll understand.'

'I *am* honest,' he protested eagerly. 'You know I loved you.'

'Yes. In a way.' Her voice was slightly shaken. 'There are so many ways of loving.'

He dropped down beside her on the little sofa.

'Marion, you know what's been between us! But I won't deceive you. Until I saw you now, I didn't know how much I loved you still. You — you are enchanting me all over again. If you really understand — you must know that.'

'Yes,' she said softly, smiling back into his eyes, a faint flush rising in her cheeks. 'Yes. I know that.'

He seized her hands.

'Marion — no other woman has ever counted!'

'Don't say that, Phil. You don't have to, really.'

'I want to say it.'

'No, you mustn't. Don't deny the past. You must keep faith with — every one.'

'With whom — but you?' he asked. Her eyes were bright with happiness. But she answered steadily.

'With her, my dear. With — Letty?'

He gave a great start of astonishment.

'Letty? Do we have to speak of her?'

'I think we do. Unless you'd rather not.'

He drew back, a little chilled with amazement.

'Just as you like. She wasn't in my thought.'

'She must be always there. In her own corner.'

'Dear, you don't understand.'

'Indeed, I do.' She drew her hands away. 'Listen to me, Phil, while I explain. Just for this once. Then if it hurts I'll never mention it again. But you must know my thoughts. I couldn't live with you, if you didn't.'

He caught rapturously at the phrase.

'You *will* live with me?' — But,

'Wait,' she said. 'For I do understand.'

What if she did, he thought. A small thing, understanding. Of so remote a past. Here was Marion again, stumbling over thought. Why not be content to feel? Succumb to the intoxication of the moment. Let explanations go! They would come later. In the intimate and tender confidence that was a part of every human passion. He'd tell her all about his life, of course. And learn of hers. But now — why talk? Why resurrect the past?

'Philip,' she said, and took his hand again, 'Philip, I wasn't the right wife for you. There's something in me that restrains expression. It checks me now. I'm just — a little person. To whom nothing much can ever happen. I'm not up to the great rôles. I know you felt that lack. But I know — I know there's a world of the emotions that I never entered. A world well lost for love. You tried to take me there, but I hung back. And so you went with her. And she became the woman of your life. You were right to take that happiness. I don't begrudge it to you.'

The woman of his life — light, laughing, Letty! Dwarfed by the perspective of the years to what insignificant proportions had her lovely little figure dwindled! But Marion was going on, her face alight with sympathy.

'There's an Olympian stage, Phil, that I've never known. With heroic figures moving about on it, motivated by tragic passions. In books — in history — I've recognized them always. You took your place among them. She did too. I wasn't up to it.'

'Marion — she didn't.'

'Oh, my dear — she did! She loved you.'

'And she left me.'

'That was my fault.'

'*Your* fault?'

'You know it was. If I had given you freedom right away, you could have kept her — saved her — married her, Phil, and been happy. But I couldn't.

Though I knew I should. At first I was too angry to be generous. And then it was too late. When you were free — she'd left you.'

Fortunately, reflected Philip wisely. The timing of his divorce had always seemed to him a signal example of God's mercy. He might have been — rash. For the moment of Letty's departure had had its pangs. Ephemeral ones, however. His hatred for the young actor manager with whom she'd gone had long since faded to a tacit sympathy. He'd had to deal with Letty, too. Adventure with Letty could have but one ending. Married her? Good Lord! If he had he'd now be in the ignominious position of that British peer! What hadn't that ingenuous lordling been through while the ancestral coronet crowned Letty's golden curls? And even after?

'I knew I was wrong, Phil. And father told me so. He said you should be free. He thought me most unwise.'

He would, thought Philip, with a tender smile for the old astronomer, standing with his silvery head in the stars, remote, withdrawn, from every practical issue of this mundane world. A precious pair of visionaries, both! Touching to think of them, secure in their domestic corner, thinking they understood, trying to be fair, talking of him and Letty as of Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura, Paolo and Francesca! Touching — but absurd!

'I was angry and humiliated and very resentful. I

was furious, Phil. Nothing more exalted. A dog in the manger for two long years. I spoiled your life. You're very generous to forgive me.'

'Dear heart,' he said, 'there's nothing to forgive. If you'll condone the fact I was untrue to you, you needn't think of Letty.'

'I want to think of her,' she answered. 'I want to share your thought. Oh, Phil, you can trust me to think kindly! I've schooled myself to that.'

'Don't think of her at all. She's nothing to me, now.'

'She's nothing to you — now?'

'And nothing then — but brief intoxication and delight. The madness of an hour.'

'An hour?'

'Well — a year, if you'll be literal.' A note of irritation crept into his voice. He felt a trifle badgered. He had long preferred to underestimate that madness. He was a clever man, but Letty had made a fool of him, of course. A public spectacle. And the rôle of fan-carrier was not, in retrospect, a grateful one. He liked to think of Letty now as a moment's ornament.

'Philip, don't be bitter. Letty had her trials, too, I'm sure. If she was false ——'

'"She wasn't false, but she was fickle,"' he quoted lightly. 'Letty meant well, my dear, and indubitably she had a way with her. But she wasn't serious. Except where her own career was concerned. Letty was an artist. She made my play. For that I'm eternally

grateful. She made my winter, also. My first one in New York. My second, too, with a difference. I'll always think tenderly of Letty. But she was not an experience to be taken too gravely.'

'Philip — she loved you.'

'As you just said yourself,' said Philip, with a smile, 'there are so many ways of loving! Letty was a practical little party at bottom. Though she didn't look it. She loved herself best. And why not? Don't we all, in the last analysis? I was a rung in her ladder. So was the young producer she decamped with. Such affairs wear themselves out, Marion. I wasn't too considerate. We were thoroughly irritated with each other long before she left me.'

This was, he felt, a just and generous statement of the facts. And one to which Letty, to do her justice, would be the first to subscribe. It ought to close the subject forever. But Marion was looking at him strangely.

'*We* were thoroughly irritated with each other,' she said, and her voice was troubled, 'before you left *me*. Do you mean to say that this — this second — experiment wasn't any more successful?'

'It was certainly less important,' he protested, lightly.

'Oh,' she said. And the monosyllable spoke volumes. 'Then just why *did* you leave me? If not for love?'

'My dear — I was twenty-eight. Please do re-

member that. I was young. I was foolish. And I thought myself the devil of a fellow. I succumbed to temptation and I went for excitement. I'm not proud of the incident. But better men than I had done the same before me. You must never think that a Letty takes the place of a wife.'

'I don't know why not,' said Marion with spirit. And rose as she spoke. 'Lots of Lettys have in the past. But, as you say, better men than you may have run off with them.'

This was disconcerting. This was unbelievable. It had the splendid insanity of a nightmare. Meticulous Marion, standing on her own domestic hearthstone, waving the brilliant bedraggled banner of loose, lovely Letty before his incredulous eyes. But surely he could explain her mistake.

'My dear,' he said, rising in his turn, and walking the length of the room before he could decide just what to say. 'My dear, Letty isn't worth all this rumpus. She didn't deserve the devotion of a lifetime. And she didn't want it. Nothing would have bored her more. Behind the footlights Letty is an actress of parts, with her eye on the future. Elsewhere — she lives for the moment.'

'We can leave Letty's character out of this discussion,' said Marion hotly. 'I'm thinking of yours.'

'My dear — I apologized. And you said you forgave me.'

'I didn't know what I was forgiving! I thought —

I thought we were discussing the grand passion. Something beyond forgiveness. Something serious and precious and eternal. Something nobody's business but your own.'

'Marion,' he said practically, taking his stand by the piano, 'Marion, what *is* a grand passion? I've never seen one.'

'Obviously,' she retorted, 'if you could wreck my life and warp your own for — excitement.'

'It was *very* exciting,' he pleaded disarmingly. And again in extenuation, 'I was twenty-eight.'

'What a fool I've been about you,' she commented briefly, 'for nine long years.'

How pretty she looked, tense and erect in the firelight!

'Please be a fool about me still,' he said. But she disregarded utterly this engaging appeal.

'My dream of an Olympian stage,' she went on bitterly, 'with you stalking about on it, an heroic figure of romance! The paradise in which I pictured you! With the world beyond its gates, well lost for love! How I've envied you, Phil, and envied her, the fulfillment of that experience! And conquered that envy at last, through passion and prayer and tearful nights and sheer force of character! What a fool I've been!'

'Marion,' he said, 'I've never seen an Olympian stage. Nor met heroic figures of romance. The world is much alike, everywhere. There is no paradise. Or

a very ephemeral one, at best. We're not fit for it long. Poor human nature is the angel with the fiery sword that drives us out into the streets again. And locks the door against our return.'

'With the same Eve,' she commented with cynicism. 'Aren't you beckoning me to paradise, now?' She had him there. He was. And himself as well. The disillusion of a lifetime was dissolving in the magic solution of her charm. Curious the hold that this passionate little Puritan had upon him. She was so pretty. And she was his wife. Or had been.

'Marion,' he said, returning to her side by the fire, 'don't quarrel. We could be so happy.'

She shook her head.

'Impossible,' she said.

'Why did you see me, then? Why did you let me come?'

'I thought I understood your point of view. I thought of us as fellow victims, Phil, devastated by the great emotional experience that had overtaken you, unaware. I thought it had justified itself. Through sincerity and passion. My life has been drab and dreary enough because of it, but I thought yours, at least, had proved a splendid disaster.'

He was looking at her very tenderly. — But,

'Life isn't like that,' he said soberly.

'Some lives are. I pictured you all these years, tossing desolately on the high seas of romance. I always hoped you would come back to me. To a tran-

quil harbor, Phil, after the storm of living. And now you have come — only to say that it was just — a squall. That it didn't even rock the boat. You shock me, Phil. You really shock me!'

'But it *was* a squall, my dear. That's all that happened. One can't control the winds of heaven.'

'"There's nothing either good or bad,"' she quoted earnestly, '"but thinking makes it so." It *should* have been a tempest. You should have felt it one. How *could* you take it lightly? How could you leave me without loving her? Or, having loved her, how could you forget her? Phil — you're a trivial person.'

He felt he wasn't. But how could he explain? Anger rose in his heart. But mainly against himself. How had he bungled this interview? There stood Marion, angry and desolate and infinitely pathetic. As he was himself. Loving him still, he thought. But how could he be sure? Like a lost child, she was, bewildered by the infinite complexity of life, yet looking at him with hard and angry eyes, refusing his hand, as that of a stranger offering to guide her home.

'Marion, no woman ever yet refused to take her husband back because he didn't love his mistress.'

'Well, I'm refusing now. You're not the man I thought you.'

'Then I must go?'

'I think you must.'

'Marion — we could be happy.'

'We might have been,' she said. 'But never now.'

'Marion, you are a fool!'

Tears glittered in her eyes.

'I know that, Phil. I know that now.'

'Marion, I want to kiss you.'

She shook her head.

'Just once, before I go.'

She shook her head again.

'Marion, I'm coming back. You're *such* a fool! I'll never give you up.'

The tears rolled down her cheeks, but she ignored them.

'Please go,' she said. 'I find this — very hard.'

'I find it — devastating,' he replied. His face was strained, but with the word a smile flickered once more across his lips. '*This* is my tempest. There's one ahead in every life, I fancy. For me, at last, all the storm signals are flying. I'm coming back, Marion, and if all you want is a shipwrecked mariner crawling up to you out of the breakers ——'

'Phil — don't be — funny.'

'I was never more serious. I'm coming back. In more romantic guise.'

She shook her head.

'It's no use, Phil. I couldn't give you what you want.'

'Well — you could give me tea,' he said.

She smiled, wanly, at that, over their clasped hands. But her despairing eyes did not relent. And so he left her.

It was only when he was on the street again that it occurred to Philip that he had never mentioned the children. Nor thought of them, after the dazzling apparition of the new Marion had flashed upon his sight. The children! His argument. His talking point. His son and daughter! He stood quite still on the windy Chicago corner, overcome with shame. What sort of father was he? What must Marion think of him? But an amazing, immediate realization brought instant comfort. For, come to think of it, she hadn't mentioned them herself. Nor thought of them, he'd swear, after she'd looked at him. Philip's spirits rose, mercurially, at a bound. The children were a secondary consideration, ignored, forgotten, in the stark emotion of their personal reunion. Only two lovers could have felt like that.

Marion was strange, incalculable, beyond all reckoning. Wandering, disconsolate, in her world of dreams. But still — disconsolate. He'd have to fight. Perhaps he couldn't win. But he'd go back. And she would give him tea. And he would tell her all he hadn't said that afternoon. And she . . .

Incredibly less old and wise than just an hour ago, Philip, the disillusioned, with quickened step and lightened heart, pursued his way in exaltation. He was in love again, thank God!

SET A THIEF

ROGER MAITLAND never understood it. Through months of resentful reflection he sought the solution in vain. It was incredible. She hadn't seemed that sort. The kind to take advantage. What it all came down to, of course, was the simple fact that she had looked the lady. She had taken him in. He would never have believed it possible.

It had been, from the very beginning, a relief to discover a woman who was frankly not intellectual. Not even clever, it seemed to Roger. And he ought to know. For the last fifteen years, since he had emerged from the drab chrysalis of an English professorship to spread his butterfly wings as a popular novelist in the sunshine of wider horizons, Roger's life had been devastated by the flattering attentions of intelligent women. He couldn't evade them. They lay in ambush around every corner. The cruder specimens, that pounced on him in spectacles in every lecture hall, could, of course, be avoided. But the subtler variety, met at the dinner-table, cunningly camouflaged by Lanvin models and ruby lipsticks to be indistinguishable from their innocuous sisters, were impossible to escape. In the complicated jungle of social existence you trod on them before you knew it. There was never a warning rattle before they struck. The

illuminatæ — what a set they were! Exhausting a man's vitality without intriguing his emotion. Incapable of realizing that all man wants of woman is love — and a modicum of appreciation. But mainly love — and certainly not thought.

But women had failed men down the ages. That was self-evident. Eternal and recurrent delusion that sympathy and understanding kindled the love-light in their lovely eyes. The more they knew the less they sympathized, really. And understanding only begot criticism. Once they had their marriage lines they sang a different tune. He'd brought that out well in his third novel, 'The Professor's Wife.' And later, in his fifth, 'Yoked to an Unbeliever,' he had shown what it did to an idealistic writer to be fettered to a materialist from early manhood. The critics had thought well of both of them, but Mary had made a fearful row. Mary was temperamental. Difficult. Well — it showed how well he'd turned the trick that she'd seen herself so clearly. Of course it was really because of 'The Shattered Lamp' that she'd left him. Carlotta hadn't cared for 'The Shattered Lamp' either. Though it had brilliantly immortalized the delights and dangers and disillusions of their brief romance. Carlotta said he'd stripped her in the market-place. She was always given to exaggeration. And Mary took it uncommon hard. Unreasonable, women. Kittle-cattle, the best of them. Why, that affair was over and done with long before he'd got out

the book. And Mary had left him. Though she remained the staunch friend of Carlotta. Of course she'd known her from childhood. Still, if there'd been a rift, you'd have thought it would have been between the women. Curious to see them united, in such a fracas, in their common animosity toward him.

Women didn't understand the urge of the artist to hold the mirror up to nature. From what secret source did they think a writer drew his inspiration if not from experience? They were incapable of rising above sordid personalities. They couldn't comprehend a life dedicated, consecrated, to an art. Look at d'Annunzio! How many times had he said that to Mary?

And here was a woman, who, when he first met her, didn't even know he wrote books. And when she did know apparently didn't care! Divine simplicity. Pretty too. So awfully pretty. And so young. Surely not yet thirty, though war-widowed and rendered vaguely romantic by that dim shadow of a girlish tragedy faced on the very threshold of experience. He'd known from that first evening, when they met on the beach before their little Cape Cod cottages, that she was going to make his summer.

'So you're my new neighbor?' she'd said so simply. Her eyes were like purple pansies in the moonlight. Her short dark hair was ruffled by the breath of the sea. 'You're a star-gazer too?' How easily they'd slipped, that very evening, into the primrose path

of dalliance by way of the interstellar spaces. The music of the spheres played an heroic accompaniment to their tremulous human voices. How simple, how natural, their discussion of the eternal verities under the fixed stars. They'd gone all the way together, at one bound, from a standing start.

'Well — what is it to be between us?' he'd asked as they parted at midnight. She'd only laughed, but so tenderly, so without a hint of mockery, as she'd vanished into her tiny rose-embowered cottage. Had she realized, he'd wondered, as he plodded over the strip of sand and beach grass to his little white house, standing stark in the moonlight, had she realized, in the darkness, that he was over fifty? Gray hair looked so blond in the moonbeams. Thank God, he'd kept his figure!

It was rather a blow to discover next morning, by discreet inquiry from the post-mistress, that she was Jane Turner. He wouldn't have believed it possible. Not that he knew much about her, of course, though the press had been full of her last autumn. The child dramatist that had crashed the gates to Broadway with her first play, 'Daisy, Don't!' He hadn't seen it, of course. It wasn't his kind of thing. But it was still playing to capacity houses, with three companies on the road and rehearsals under way for a London production. He'd read somewhere that she'd salted away a million dollars from that meretricious little farce. He'd felt from the moment he'd read those

figures that it *must* be meretricious. If not from a moral, at least from an artistic, standpoint. Otherwise it wouldn't have been such a smashing hit. He had all the novelist's scorn of the drama — that prostituted art, debased to the level of the public taste. He knew. He had tried his hand once at a play — a stark little story of seduction based on an incident in the life of a botany professor in his old university. It had opened in Cleveland and run two weeks. But the public couldn't face realism. Didn't want to face it, under the proscenium arch. The play had failed, but, before failing, really it had played the very devil with his life on the campus. The professor of botany took it personally. The Board of Trustees were aroused. Good old Methodists that they were, they evidently felt that men should stand together, the love-life of their faculty should be sacrosanct. Benighted bigots, controlling the education of the youth of the nation! The president of the university had had him up to rake him over the coals on the score of bringing undesirable publicity to the college. Good God! Free speech? It didn't exist in America!

So she was Jane Turner. He wished he'd seen her play. Probably it was just a fluke. For surely that girl wasn't consciously clever. She was far too charming for that. She must have been born with that sordid sixth sense, the sense of the theater, that seemed to paralyze all other senses, including the common one, in the popular dramatist's outlook on

life. But — she was Jane Turner. Disconcerting, that discovery, after the confidences of last evening. Roger Maitland strolled back to the beach from the village in a state of preoccupation from which not even the insistent letter from his publishers, clamoring for that new novel, promised for September first and not yet begun, could quite arouse him.

Ah, there she was, in her garden, behind the hollyhocks, stooping to pick the velvet pansies that were like her eyes. She straightened up to wave to him gayly. Really a picture, in that blue smock, under the arch of roses. Not a woman who depended on the moonlight to enhance her charms. Just as pretty under the glaring sun of high noon.

'So you're Jane Turner,' he said as he joined her.

She admitted the soft impeachment with an impish twinkle.

'Are you surprised?' she asked.

'You look too young to be any one. Any one who'd set the Thames afire.'

'Only the Hudson,' she smiled in deprecation. 'I'm hoping for the Thames. But I fancy it will be harder to ignite. In point of fact I'm not so young. I'm a miracle of preservation. I'm twenty-eight.'

Twice her age! Bar two fleeting years. Well — he didn't look it. At least she didn't look as if she thought so.

'I — I haven't seen your play,' he offered in apology. 'I live in the West.'

'Why should you have seen it? Wherever you live?' she asked lightly. 'It's very unimportant.'

Incredible woman! With a sense of proportion!

'I wish I had,' he said earnestly. 'I write myself. I'm Roger Maitland.'

'Oh?' The monosyllable was vague. 'I'm very stupid. I don't read much. Won't you come in? I must take these flowers out of the sun.' She picked up an armful of larkspur and roses from the little stone wall and dropped her nosegay of pansies into the pocket of her smock. 'What do you write?' she asked over her shoulder as she preceded him down the garden path.

'Novels,' he said briefly, watching the blue-black gleam of the sunlight in her hair. Then, as she'd set the style for modesty, 'I'm only a college professor.'

She let the humble statement pass unchallenged.

'Like me, you've come here to write?'

'Yes. Are you doing another play?'

'I must — while I'm still in the public eye. But it's hard to get started. I'm looking for a subject.'

'I think I've found one,' he said, with meaning, as she pushed open her little green door.

The tiny room was just like her. Flowers everywhere. A little fire smouldering on the hearth. A comfortable chair or two. A chaise-longue near the chimney piece. An absurdly businesslike little typewriter on the table under the window that looked over

the sea. A romantic window, with leaded casements, added to the tiny colonial cottage by some previous occupant with less feeling for congruity than romance. Still it was delightful, framed without in roses, and commanding, from that homely interior, the vast, empty expanse of sand and sea and sky. As she closed the door and turned to smile at him he felt a charming sense of intimacy.

'Won't you smoke?' she asked. Her cigarettes had a golden monogram. And an aromatic perfume. They recalled the rumored million. Irritating, always, to think of that amount of money so easily and undeservedly made. But she was charmingly simple. Perhaps the report was exaggerated. Some press agent's ignoble device.

'Take these vases,' she was saying prettily, 'and fill them in the kitchen. I haven't a maid. Just a girl who comes in. I like to live alone.'

Delightful to arrange the larkspur and pansies in such charming company! To be concerned over the prick of a rose thorn in a little pink thumb! They placed the last vase beside the typewriter. The girl stood for a moment, gazing out over the waste of blue. Like that, slender and wistful at her window, she suggested everything romantic and unattained. More and more Roger became convinced that this little friendly room was to prove, before the summer was over, the setting for perhaps the best of all his romances.

'"Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas,"'

he said.

'Are they so perilous?' she answered lightly. 'It's only Nantucket Sound.'

'Aren't they?' he asked. 'Won't they be? Perhaps? For us?' He was standing very near her.

'Perhaps. Personalities make for peril. But I'm a steady sailor. You had better be on your guard.'

'Had I?' he asked a little tremulously. Her eyes fell before his own. — But,

'Yes. I think so,' she said, quite practically.

It was the window that suggested the title. 'Charmed Casement,' he called it, and the novel fairly seemed to write itself. Every morning he worked in his little white cottage, and she, only a few hundred feet away, separated from him by that stretch of sand and sunshine and the more tangible barrier of her little hedge of hollyhocks, seemed always busy at her typing. It was a perfect intimacy.

'You've found your subject?' he asked the second morning. They'd had another evening on the beach.

'Yes. But I have my misgivings about using it,' she answered, quite soberly. Later she told him she had decided it would do. That was after he had begun to lend her his novels. She read them with the most thoughtful appreciation.

'They have a most delightful quality of verisimili-

tude,' was her comment. 'I've rarely read anything that seemed more — authentic.'

'They *are* authentic,' he said earnestly. 'For the artist all experience is dedicated. My life has gone into them.'

She understood that, of course. She understood everything. She listened, a wide-eyed Desdemona, to the tale of his creative adventure. It was really wonderful. She was all on his side. She understood Mary. And Carlotta. And the professor of botany. Also the wife of his friend in the mathematics department who had so deeply resented 'The Personal Equation.' As if her husband were the only man in the world who had loved and run off with his wife's sister!

She understood so much that finally he told her even about Millicent. Though that story was so recent that it really hurt him to tell. It had happened only last April. And Millicent had proved very disappointing. She had said bitter things to him. Things that were not easily forgotten. Things that hurt. If you were a sensitive person. There was no reason in the world why she should have resented 'The Heart of Ruth.' It had dealt very tenderly with their month together in the opalescent deserts of Santa Fé. Millicent had seemed so understanding. And he had understood her so perfectly. 'The Heart of Ruth' was an inspired title. In it was all of Millicent. Millicent, fighting for health with the aid of

climate, weary of the desert, weary of the West, clinging to him in the ecstasy of finding some one of her own kind again, some one to talk to, to sympathize, to comprehend. That was just what she'd meant to him from the moment he first saw her, pale, sensitized product of New England, standing in the golden sunlight of her little Spanish patio,

> 'The sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood, in tears, amid the alien corn.'

And he'd done her beautifully. There was nothing to resent. On the contrary.

'But you said I was your mistress!' She had argued, pale, really pale, with anger.

'But you weren't,' he had offered plausibly. That ought to pacify her. Facts were facts.

'I wouldn't be! You know how near I came to it. And every one believes it. You don't know how they are talking.'

Again that sordid preoccupation with the gossip of unimportant and irrelevant persons! Talk! No woman could rise above it. Creatures of impulse. And so fatally personal! Jane understood his position. And said so. It was very soothing.

'Do I bore you? Talking about it?' he asked. They were sailing her little catboat at the moment.

'Never,' she answered, as the lee rail cut the foam — she had a sporty hand on the tiller — 'I think it's absorbing. Isn't it the story of your soul?'

Nevertheless, in spite of such encouragement, he

felt no particular urge to read her the opening chapters of his new novel. He'd learned about women — from many. In the last ditch they could never be counted on. That was their difficulty. And the story was turning out so well. No sense in taking the chance of having to scrap it.

On her part she would never show him the play.

'Not 'til it's finished,' she said. 'I doubt if you'll like it then.'

He doubted it too and was glad to postpone the embarrassing moment. It might spoil everything. If he were not able to conceal his opinion of her rather mediocre achievement. And with every blue and golden day that passed Roger increasingly felt that there was everything to spoil. She certainly encouraged him. There was no mistaking the light that shone in those pansy eyes. He'd pressed her hand in the priceless privacy of that little catboat. He'd touched her hair with his lips one starlit evening in her tiny heliotrope-scented garden. Or almost. She'd slipped very quickly from what had been so nearly an embrace.

'Not yet,' she'd said breathlessly. Now what did she mean by that? All night he'd wondered. By the following evening he had decided to take a chance on it.

'I've been thinking,' he said, gazing into the rose and gray embers of her little fire. It was a rainy evening in late August. 'I've been thinking how quickly the summer has gone.'

'It has, hasn't it?' she responded. 'We've both been busy.'

'I hate to have it over. I hate to lose you. I wish — do you know — I wish we could write a play together.'

'*Do* you?' she said. 'A play. That *is* an idea. I should never have thought of it. But my play's not finished. And I have to go down to New York with it in early September. We'd have no time.'

'Not here,' he said. 'Not this summer. My novel's promised for September first. And then there'll be proof-reading. But later — I thought — in October. I've wondered — I've wondered — if you wouldn't come up with me to my little Adirondack camp. I'm not due back in my classrooms 'til the second semester. We'd see the leaves turn. And talk. And write. Together.'

She seemed to consider the proposal and all its implications quite gravely. For all her youth a woman who knew her way about. Perhaps too clearly. A trifle disillusioned? That was her only fault.

'And what should we write?' she asked lucidly.

'I've a play in mind,' he said easily. 'A story a woman once told me about her husband. A dean, he was, in the business school. The girl was a student of his. Studying stenography.'

'Oh?' Her voice was vague. 'I see. How did she happen to tell you?'

'I knew the man. He was really a good sort. But she was considering divorce. I patched it up between them. I was so happy to do it. I think,' he ended candidly, 'they both consider me their best friend.'

Obviously he had impressed her. She looked quite startled.

'And we'd write it up? How delightful! I mean — to have a plot ready-made — provided by — friends. I'm sure I could learn a great deal about playwriting from you.'

Well, she was right. She could. Why deny it? He knew the world of men and emotion. And she, of course, would make her contribution too. If she *had* that gift for stringing together a series of scenes so that they brought in a million dollars in ten months. The play was not merely a pretext. Whatever else developed between them they would try their hand at the drama.

'You'll come?' His voice was eager.

'In October? If you still — want me,' she said very simply.

A light of elation flashed in his eyes. He made a restless movement toward her. And then, it was like a play in itself, the telephone rang. She stepped into the little kitchen to answer it. Her words came, muffled but still audible, through the flimsy partition of lath and plaster.

'Hello. Hello — Yes. This is Mrs. Turner — New York calling? All right. All right — Hello —

Hello. Oh, hello, Ikey! — Yes. I'm coming down next week. Bringing the rewritten text — Yes. All done — Honestly. And Ikey, I've got to see that actor before you sign his contract — Yes. Absolutely — Well, because I have a type in mind — Oh, sure! Sign up with the girl. Any pretty skirt will do — Absolutely — Just so she's a heart-breaker — But the man I'm fussy about — Well, middle-aged, you know, and then some! Gray hair and a tightening waistcoat. But plenty of joie de vivre, old dear! If you get me! — You bet! — A fast worker, from the very start! — You have to get his number as soon as the first gun's fired. I want an actor who knows what it's all about. You know, that rare one, with a bean! You find him for me! — Righto! I'll see him when I come — Well, say Wednesday morning. I'll take the New Bedford boat. So long, Ikey — You're my best friend!'

This, he presumed, was the parlance of Broadway. How easily she slipped into it. Unpleasant, to hear her. But how charmingly untouched by her more sordid contacts she seemed, as she returned to the fire and dropped into her chaise-longue in that cherry-colored tea-gown. Nevertheless the charm was broken. She was delightfully cordial, but somehow she conveyed the impression that she expected him to go. He couldn't return to that question of October in the mountains. Still — he had her promise.

He missed her frightfully after her departure. A brief note from New York soon informed him that she was not coming back to the Cape. The play was going into immediate rehearsal. 'I have to stay,' she wrote, 'to make things difficult for the producer. It's good for his soul.' But he could see her in early October. She would send him a seat for the opening night. She hoped he would come. And indeed he would. The book would be finished by then. He was correcting the page proof now. And it completely satisfied him. One of his best, he thought. Written in an idyllic vein that he had never attempted before. It *had* been an idyll — their wind-swept summer on the beach and bay. Their long, uninterrupted afternoons with nothing but the movement of the golden sun across the stainless Cape Cod sky to mark the passing of enchanted hours. Their confidential evenings under the spangled canopy of night or close together in her little room, watching the fluttering rainbow of her driftwood fire. They lent themselves to good writing. She had found them idyllic too.

Her attitude, throughout, had been delightfully acquiescent. As indeed the conclusion of his book, 'Charmed Casement,' implied. For the inference of his last chapter certainly was that, if the casement had been charmed, he had been allowed to enter by it. Still, a novel had to be about something. You had to work up to a climax. And she *had* said she would come up to the Adirondacks. She wouldn't have

Millicent's argument, after all, when the novel was on the bookstalls. Jane wasn't soft, like Millicent, anyway. Something told him she would never take the reproachful line. She was able to look out for herself. Not that she was hard, like Carlotta, either. Carlotta had been ready to accept consequence, riding hard on the heels of action, but Carlotta was bitter. And her tongue was really undisciplined. What was it she had said to him in that last frightful interview? 'The coward does it with a kiss, the brave man with a sword. Each to his trade, Roger! You do it with a presentation copy of the first edition!' That was unkind. He had never been able to forget it.

It was with quite a little flutter of excitement, that crisp October morning, that he motored to Providence to catch the train for New York. Thrilling, really, to see her again. By what mysterious alchemy had that girl succeeded so perfectly in restoring the illusion of his youth. He didn't feel a day over thirty. He felt convinced that the best of life was still ahead of him. In three weeks they would be in the Adirondacks. As the train pulled into the city, his heart was dancing in the bright autumnal sunshine like the wash of the Italians, fluttering from the tenement windows. The simile struck him as the train rushed into the Park Avenue tunnel, and he smiled at himself a little fondly. After all, he was fifty-four. But he felt like a boy again.

His ticket was waiting for him at his hotel, with

a brief note. 'Don't try to see me to-day. I'm too busy.' He had hoped for tea. But there would be to-morrow. When she was less preoccupied. First nights, he presumed, were always rather a strain. A fleeting memory of that terrible opening in Cleveland passed through his mind. But his play had been — important. Surely she couldn't be taking hers quite so seriously. She had too much humor for that.

He dined well, and, as his taxi turned off Broadway into West Forty-Fifth Street, he was looking forward, with fond indulgence, to an evening of humorous deprecation at the theater. A great crowd was out, jostling good-humoredly down the sidewalk, trickling over the curbstones between the wheels of the motors. The street was glowing with the mellow diffused radiance of a myriad incandescent billboards. Which was her show? he wondered. His cab pulled out of the jam of traffic toward the curb. Ah, there she was! 'Jane Turner,' in ruby letters. And below, what did the golden symbols signify? 'Oh! Oh! Professor!' Why — that couldn't be her play! It was. The taxi was stopping. In a trance he paid the driver and struggled through the congested lobby. 'Oh! Oh! Professor!' What a title! Now — what did she mean by that?

The rest of the evening, lived through somehow in his seat in the fifth row, was, in retrospect, a nightmare. He sat, spellbound, in the midst of that rocking audience, watching her caricature of a mature

professorial gentleman walking through his scenes with the artless heroine, led on by her ingenuous wiles to what shameless revelations of the fatuous sentimentalities of middle age. Sat following that incredible plot of a hoary-headed fool, writing up the heart throbs of a romantic episode in a serious novel, while the insouciante heroine cartooned them in a howling farce. It was tragedy! That was what it was — stark tragedy. But the audience screamed with delight. A poignant example of the brutality of mob psychology. They made a Roman holiday of that unfortunate professor. They mocked his amorous adventure. They found him only absurd.

It was outrageous — this public betrayal. Roger sat sunk in the desolating sense of personal humiliation. This, then, was what she had thought of him. She was telling the world. He felt himself an eavesdropper on that monstrous confidence. And certainly one proverbially hearing no good of himself. Dignity demanded that he should arise at once and leave the theater in disdain. But, crushed under the weight of misfortune, some fatal fascination held him in his seat. It *was* like eavesdropping. He couldn't dismiss the horrid temptation to hear what she'd say next. He had to see out the débâcle of his romance.

Resentment rose assuagingly in the heart of Roger. What a woman! Unfair! Unjust! He wasn't like that. Had never been. Couldn't be. It was an insult. An outrage. A libel. He would bring action. No, he

wouldn't. He would ignore it. After all, no one would know. It was quite between themselves. And then upon his ear fell a well-remembered sentence, a fatally familiar reply. Great Heavens, she was using their very dialogue! Had the woman no sensibilities? No delicacy? It was sacrilege. That interchange of confidence, that this insensate audience seemed to find so highly amusing, had occurred behind the hollyhocks in her little garden. His heart had gone into it. Also some of his best phrases. And, good God! It formed the opening paragraph of the third chapter of his book!

The last curtain fell on uproarious plaudits, on the audience rising in laughter, on delighted critics making for the door. It rose again to shrill, repeated cries for 'author.' And there she was, laughing and bowing to her public, a little older in the glow of the footlights than she'd looked in the summer sunshine, a little more sophisticated in her austere black evening frock and formal rope of pearls. But still incredibly young and charming to have done this thing to him, and leaving his life forever with one supremely ironic gesture. She was carrying the great sheaf of roses he'd sent her at the theater that afternoon.

Sore and resentful, Roger awoke next morning and rang for the papers with his black coffee. Too ill to eat, he was, after the night he'd had. Women! What a sex they were! As false as they were fair! What hadn't men suffered at their hands, down the ages?

But Jane! Jane had seemed so — different. He felt positively Byronic.

'In secret we met,
In silence I grieve
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive ——

They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well ——'

But they would know, damn them! Every one would. Concealment was impossible. His book was in the hands of the binders. It was as good as on the bookstalls. Suppress the edition? But, what an admission! What a damnable mess!

The bellboy entered with tray and papers. His coffee forgotten, Roger turned feverishly to the dramatic pages. Of course. He had expected it. Extravagant, preposterous, praise. 'Jane Turner's turned the trick again.' 'Delightful exposition of the fatuous lady-killer.' 'With no loss of comedy and climax Jane Turner's second farce shows a depth of character study far beyond her work in "Daisy, Don't!"' 'The ironic pen of the child dramatist.' 'Mrs. Turner's manager, Mr. Isaac Morgenstein, authorizes the statement that a second cast goes into rehearsal to-morrow and will open "Oh! Oh! Professor!" in Chicago, November first. Plans under way for a road company to tour the Far West.' And the inevitable personal interview! 'Mrs. Turner, late last night in her Park Avenue apartment, indignantly de-

nied the rumor current on Broadway that her play was intended as a lampoon on a certain professorial novelist whose books have enjoyed a wide circulation during the last decade.'

It was simply incredible. He had been so innocent. She had betrayed a friendship. Dastardly exploitation! Good God! What a woman! Had she no reticences? No reserves? No respect for confidence? Sipping his lukewarm coffee in his hotel bedroom, Roger felt strangely abused. And shaken. And alone. Curious that his thoughts at this poignant moment should return to his former wife. Where was Mary, to-day, he wondered? She was living in Paris, on the left bank, where one could get the most for one's alimony. He wished she were there that minute. Mary had her faults, of course. Grave ones, too. Mary had failed him in certain critical emergencies. But Mary had a sense of justice and she had a feeling for what just wasn't done. She would have been the first to resent that scurrilous play.

FEATHER BEDS

FEATHER BEDS

In spite of his intense preoccupation with his two perplexing problems, Matthew Martin felt, as always when he turned his sporting roadster through his Italian gateway, the familiar sense of rising irritation. This afternoon it was the sight of the three gardeners that provoked it. One clipping the privet hedge, already pruned to faultless conformity, another cutting the smooth turf edges of the carriage drive, and a third raking the gravel under the porte-cochère, obliterating the wheel marks of the car that had preceded him with passionate precision.

'Dusting nature!' thought Matthew contemptuously, throwing on his brakes with an irascible energy that scored the spotless gravel beneath his wheels. The third gardener, touching his cap, looked at him reproachfully. The gardeners all shared Ethel's inexplicable passion for painting the lily. He himself preferred to take God's great out-of-doors as he found it.

Absurd, three gardeners on seven Long Island acres! And two men in the garage, besides, and four on the yacht and one in the pantry. Of course it was Ethel's money. But, even so, it was always annoying to watch them everlastingly hulking about on their useless, fruitless labors. He himself would have pre-

ferred a six-room shack on a desert island for a summer residence, a friendly 'couple' to cook and clean, and a sign at the gate forbidding lawnmowers on the premises!

The butler, having sensed his approach with the mysterious clairvoyance of the perfect servant, stood unsummoned on the threshold, holding open the door for his entrance. Matthew would rather have used his latchkey. He wanted no waiting on. Servants were a bore. Nevertheless he *would* let the chauffeur run the roadster around to the garage.

'Tell James to take the car, Picks,' he said briefly. 'And remind him to look the valves over. One of them is tapping badly. He'd better overhaul it thoroughly before Monday morning. Where is Mrs. Martin?'

'On the terrace, sir. Tea has just been served.'

Well, he wouldn't go out there. Not just yet. He'd step into his study and collect his thoughts a bit. He entered the pleasant book-lined room, the only corner in the house that was really his, with a cheering sense of momentary reprieve. How he hated house parties! And what a week-end was before him! It was enough to have the directorship of the Institute hanging in the balance, the Board undecided, the meeting adjourned, without having to face this new problem, forced on him by Ethel, this problem of meeting Susy.

The long and the short of it was, of course, that

he'd rather be shot than see her again. Preposterous, unbelievable, that the memory of that woman still lingered in his heart! Woman? Why she was a kid of nineteen when they made their fatal decision. And he just turned twenty-three. What did it amount to, anyway? A broken engagement. Seventeen years ago. But some things, somehow, you just didn't get over. He could see that starlit Indiana cornfield that minute. And Susy in white muslin, smiling wistfully through her tears. It had been a dreadful moment when they clasped hands tremulously over what they'd always called the wishing gate and, with a wisdom — or was it folly? — beyond their years, wished each other good luck and Godspeed. He'd never gone back to his home town again.

Awkward it was, damned awkward, Ethel's meeting Susy like that, last spring in Santa Barbara, and taking such a fancy to her husband! Asking them down for the week-end, now that they'd come East for that Tuxedo wedding. Just the sort of thing that happened in bad novels and successful plays and, yes, possibly in day-dreams, but never in life. Better it shouldn't. Upsetting. That was what it was. He certainly did not want to see Susy. Susy married to a bishop! Incredible thought! It didn't make it a bit better to remember that the bishop was, after all, only Chuck Dayton. Chuck, the mill-owner's heir in that little Indiana town. Chuck, Susy's hopeless

adorer. Susy — married to Chuck. Susy married to any one.

Of course she couldn't be the same Susy. He could count on that to save the situation. Thirteen years with a bishop would change any woman. Though of course Chuck had only been a bishop for five. Still, looking back on him in the light of later knowledge you could see he'd had it in him from the start. Yet Susy had married him. Now, why the devil? Oh, well — Susy was bound to have married some one. After all — he had married some one himself.

A bad business any way you looked at it. After that irrevocable parting at the wishing gate the only safe place in which to meet Susy was the kingdom of heaven, where proverbially there was neither marriage nor giving in marriage.

But this was Long Island and she was coming. Coming with her bishop, almost immediately, on the afternoon train. The week-end was before him. Well — he supposed he would weather it somehow. This worrying wasn't getting him anywhere. He'd step out on the terrace and seek solace in human society and a sustaining cup of tea.

Who was here, anyway? If Ethel had told him he didn't remember. Matthew paused to reconnoiter, peering cautiously through the filet curtain of the French window into the golden glow of late September sunshine that flooded the terrace beyond. At first he saw no one. Only the perfect lawn, streaked

with the shadows of the plumy elms. The geometric gardens, stretched in lovely artificial vistas to the sparkling blue waters of the Sound.

Then he heard laughter from the other end of the terrace. The tea-table was set in the shadow of the pergola, under the eglantine. That was Jack's laugh. He and Jocelyn would be there. They always were, of course, at Ethel's parties. The perfect couple for all social purposes. Professional week-enders. Guaranteed to mix with any one, even bishops, without apparent friction. To judge by his laugh Jack must be drinking about his third highball. There he was, standing fat and funny on the emerald turf, his bald head shining cheerfully in the light of the September sun.

Jocelyn was sitting on the Italian balustrade, cocking her preposterous little gray head, tempestuously bobbed, at Denis Lane, standing tea-cup in hand at her side. She wasn't making much headway. His great gray eyes were fixed in reflective melancholy on Ethel, across the tea-table.

Ethel was vamping a new one. An exquisite young man with faultless haberdashery, whom Matthew could vaguely remember having seen somewhere, at a party. He was a new one, all right. Matthew recognized his wife's preliminary passes at a glance. She lay indolently stretched on a chaise-longue under the eglantine, her blonde bobbed head reclining on blue taffeta cushions, her great blue eyes gazing dreamily down at the boy sitting cross-legged on the grass at

her feet. Ethel never looked more romantically tender than when one young man was waxing and another waning. Love did a lot for a woman.

Matthew was glad that Denis Lane's sun was setting. Denis had been an expensive treat. A pensive young playwright who had only needed a hearing to be recognized. That was a sad day, financially speaking, when he first turned up to read Ethel his fragments of polyphonic prose. Matthew never knew how many thousands she had dropped in that ridiculous production of his miracle play 'Saint Catherine's Wheel.' It had run for nine nights. Well, it was Ethel's money. And she'd had a whirl over it, being a highbrow and playing Mæcenas. Who was the fellow on the grass, he wondered? He hoped his tastes were simple. Matthew opened the long French window and stepped out on the terrace.

'Here's the great man!' called Jocelyn, waving her highball.

'In person!' said Jack.

'Have you heard, Matthew, what Ethel's got in store for us?'

'My God! A bishop!' Jack and Jocelyn were obviously in splendid form.

'You can't think how she's carrying on about him! She says it's an ember day and we all have to eat lobster for dinner. No meat on the menu to-night. No bridge in the home on Sunday. Cruel and unusual, I call it!'

'You won't when you see him,' said Ethel. 'Get yourself some tea, dear, if you want it. There's whiskey, if you'd rather. — He's not a bit like a bishop. Rather more like an archangel, if you know what I mean. Lovely to look at and awfully athletic.'

'Does he wear gaiters?'

'Oh, yes. All the trimmings. And his legs are simply divine. Quite a treat for the tired business woman.'

'But his wife, Ethel?' Matthew felt his heart turn over at Jocelyn's careless question. 'I can just *see* his wife! Jack, dear, you had better have a fourth highball. It's going to be a bad week-end for you boys!'

'Don't worry about his wife! She's the toast of the diocese.'

'Well, it all seems highly irregular. Last time we were out here, darling, you had a yogi. You remember, Jack — we lived on curried rice. But it seems somehow more outré to be making all this fuss about a Christian bishop.'

'Oh,' interposed Ethel languidly, 'Matthew hasn't met Percy. Percy Devereaux, dear. You know. Who did so much for the American Wing.'

Matthew knew all right. So that would be the next thing. Interior decorating. Pine dressers replacing Louis Quinze consoles in the Park Avenue apartment. Georgian paneling ripped out to make way for hand-hewed beams, nailed to the steel superstructure with wooden pegs. Ethel bidding against the Metropolitan for a hooked rug. Well — it wasn't his funeral.

It was her money. Matthew poured himself a cup of tea.

'Did the Board of Trustees meet to-day, dear?' inquired Ethel.

'Yes,' said Matthew briefly.

'No news?'

'Not yet. They've adjourned 'til to-morrow night.'

'You're not worried, old man, are you?' asked Jack solicitously. 'You have that Board in the hollow of your hand.'

'Oh, I don't know.' Matthew helped himself to cream.

'Why, I thought it was all set.'

'Nothing's set until it's announced.'

'Matthew, darling' — that was Jocelyn — 'you're simply hysterical. The moment old Heffelfinger resigned it was all over but the shouting. Who *could* be the new Director but you?'

'There's Elfborg.'

'That Swede!'

'He's done some damn good work with infantile serum.'

There was a little chorus of friendly protest.

'Matthew, you're simply morbid!'

'You've done damn good work with cancer.'

'And it's Ethel's father's Institute.'

'His own foundation.'

'If you can't land a job for a son-in-law with sixteen million dollars ——'

'That's what I've been telling him, Jocelyn! Father would never let ——'

Matthew put down his cup in irritation.

'You don't understand.' They didn't, of course. But nevertheless they voiced the verdict of the world. Possibly of the Board. What recognition did research command beyond the walls of the laboratory? It was perfectly true. The simple fact that he'd married Ethel, the steel king's daughter, might actually tip the scales against old Elfborg, who had married a Danish chemist and lived in Yonkers, with three children, on their combined salaries of seven thousand a year! But he wished they wouldn't rub it in. Humiliating to remember, at such a moment, that life was like that. It turned achievement to dross.

The sound of a motor turning into the driveway drove the frown of irritation from Matthew's brow. Good Lord, she was coming! He retreated beneath the eglantine. Ethel rose from the chaise-longue. She moved across the terrace, in fluttering chiffon, a figure of languid grace.

'Now watch your step, Jack!' cried Jocelyn gayly. 'Try not to disgrace me! Endeavor to recall the catechism, and if you can remember any one of the thirty-nine articles ——'

The French windows were thrown open ceremoniously by Picks. And a lady of fashion stood on the terrace. That was Matthew's first impression. A

lady of fashion, with a bishop beside her. That wasn't Susy, smiling cordially up at Ethel, glancing appreciatively around the terrace, applauding the gardens, the lawn, the Sound. Including the bishop in her graceful entry, advancing toward the tea-table, acknowledging introductions, meeting Jocelyn with a smile. A lady of fashion. Not Susy, at all.

He stepped from beneath the eglantine.

'Mat!' She turned to laugh up at him. Of course it was Susy! Her little gloved hand lingered for an almost imperceptible instant in his own. Her brown eyes danced with pleasure. The same small golden devils flickered in their depths. 'Mat! How lovely to see you! And how very queer!'

Then Chuck was upon him. The same Chuck, too, in spite of black broadcloth! In spite of his collar! In spite of the touch of hoar frost that silvered, becomingly, his curly black hair. The same dark, deep-set, earnest eyes. The pre-Raphaelite chin line. That look of the boy chorister that Susy had once professed to find so supremely amusing.

'Why, where did you all know each other?' Jocelyn was demanding.

'Back in Connersville, Indiana,' said Matthew.

'Do you mean to say you've never heard of *me?*' demanded Susy. 'Why, I was the girl he left behind him,' she explained with lucidity. 'You know — in a pink sunbonnet, hanging over the five-barred gate when he set out for the big city.'

'*You* come from — Connersville?' Politeness struggled with incredulity in Jocelyn's tone.

Matthew smiled with a certain cynicism. Of course he'd always known that that was what all Ethel's old friends thought, in the last analysis, of him. He had lived seventeen years on Manhattan Island. He had married Ethel Pierrepont. He had almost found the cancer bug. Still — he came from Connersville. They'd write it on his tombstone. But Susy was taking up the cudgels for their native heath.

'Yes. And proud of it. Though I know you mean that inflection for a compliment! I haven't been back for ages. Chuck was rector of Saint George's in Hartford when we were married. But, Mat, how *are* you? Tell me how you've been carrying on without me all these years?'

'Oh, with great difficulty.'

'You're awfully distinguished. But don't tell me you haven't had some bad moments. I couldn't bear it.'

'My life's been one long regret.' He couldn't take his eyes off her, but this light touch was saving everything. 'Hasn't it, Ethel?'

But Ethel was giving the bishop his tea. Chuck accepted his cup with a vaguely Episcopal gesture. A movement of the elbows that seemed to allow for the ample muslin sleeves of his office. His deep-set eyes were fixed on Ethel's lovely face in benevolent admiration. The sunlight glittered on his pectoral cross. Matthew could just see what a hit he must

make with the Women's Auxiliary. But somehow it didn't seem real at all. He was just Chuck — in fancy dress. Rehearsing a rôle, perhaps with the Connersville Thespians in the old Masonic temple on Main Street. Chuck had always been the prop of the Connersville Thespians. Matthew vaguely recalled that he had chosen with difficulty between the Church and the stage in selecting a career. It had worried his widowed mother.

He turned again to Susy, but Jack had taken possession of her. He was offering her her tea with his most gallant air. She dropped on the balustrade, tossed off her hat and shook her curly auburn head in the sun. Her hair was short, of course. He missed the waving pompadour. Good Lord, how old was she? If he was forty, preposterous thought, she must be thirty-six! She looked incredibly young.

She looked, incredibly, younger, three hours later, when she came down the Italian staircase to join the little cocktail party before the great hall fire. Ethel's interiors were cleverly planned to set off a beautiful woman. Ethel, herself, an instant before, descending those stairs in a mediæval tea-gown, had quite taken their breath away.

'You look like Lucrezia Borgia in a more innocent mood,' Percy Devereaux had asserted.

'Not *too* innocent,' Ethel had protested, with a little lingering glance of lazy provocation from under drooping eyelids.

Denis Lane had writhed on the hearthrug. Clearly he glimpsed the poison ring on Lucrezia's lovely finger as she handed him his cocktail. The oubliette was yawning at his feet. Matthew was sincerely sorry for him. He cut a ridiculous figure, standing miserably by while Ethel languidly flashed those R.S.V.P. eyes on Percy! Of course he was a fool.

But if Ethel was Lucrezia, Susy was Juliet! She paused an instant on the landing to look tranquilly down at them, her hand on the delicate iron railing, her slender figure, in ivory satin, outlined against the stucco wall. A slim white candle of a woman, her head a yellow flame.

She caught the tacit admiration in their upturned faces and smiled a little shyly.

'I do love parties!' she said simply. And ran down the staircase. Juliet — precisely Juliet. Juliet entering the Capulet ball.

Then Chuck descended, picturesquely clerical in his sable waistcoat. His gaitered legs tripped nimbly down the stairs. No spoil-sport, Chuck. A regular fellow. The hand adorned with the Episcopal ring accepted a second cocktail with benevolent alacrity. Even before the announcement of dinner, it was clear he was intriguing Jocelyn. Her little mocking face was eager as she looked up into his earnest eyes. His head was bent in a pleasing mixture of flattery and benediction.

Matthew offered his arm to Susy. Her little fingers

rested on his sleeve. Was there an instant's pressure? He couldn't quite be sure. Then she twinkled up at him and frankly squeezed his elbow.

'Mat, this is fun!' she said.

The others trooped after them with talk and laughter. They circled the table in a little festive confusion of movement and sound. Then there was an instant's pause, an almost imperceptible hesitation in the social beat. Matthew glanced inquiringly at Ethel. She was standing behind her chair. Her commanding eye dominated the scene. It conveyed a subtle rebuke to the irrepressible Jocelyn whispering a naughty nothing in Percy's receptive ear. Jack's jovial laugh faltered to a note of interrogation.

'Will you ask the blessing, Bishop Dayton?' she murmured magnificently.

Chuck's sonorous periods rang out over the bowed heads of the dinner party. Matthew admired his wife whole-heartedly. Ethel was really superb.

And so was Susy. The light touch never faltered. Why had he worried over this reunion? She took it completely for granted. What a fool he'd been to dread it! It was perfect — simply perfect — this being with Susy again.

But he wanted to talk to her. Tell her about — everything. Just as he used to. He wanted her sympathy. Her quick understanding. Before he had finished with the penitential lobster, Matthew was finding the light touch a bit of a nuisance. A shining

rapier, twisting, turning, in the deft hand of Susy, parrying his efforts to draw a little nearer, pinning him in the corner of the safely humorous, fighting off the sentiment she read within his eyes.

Would her guard never be lowered? Had he found her, just to lose her? Must they go unspoken — those things he had to say to her? Did she know them — without saying? Did she fear to hear them said?

Ethel was rising before he had decided.

'Jocelyn wants her bridge,' she was saying brightly. 'Don't keep them too long, Matthew.'

He certainly wouldn't. He wanted his Susy. Twenty minutes later, Jack relinquished his port with a gusty sigh. Picks was arranging the green baise table as they entered the living-room.

'Do you play, Bishop Dayton?' Jocelyn inquired.

'He's an expert,' said Ethel. She was pairing her party with an experienced eye. 'I think, Jocelyn, you and the Bishop against Jack and — Denis.' Lane looked his mute reproach. 'I want Percy to tell me what I can do for Matthew's study. It's fearfully shabby.' Matthew looked up warningly. Hands off his study! But his attention was quickly diverted.

'Don't you play, Mrs. Dayton?' Jack was asking a trifle eagerly. Obviously he felt something was owing him in lieu of the port. Matthew hung on her reply.

'I'm not in my husband's class,' said Susy mod-

estly. Matthew's lips curved in a triumphant smile.

'A cent a point?' suggested Jocelyn, and was withered by Ethel's reproving glance. Chuck made it all right in a moment. He raised a warning finger, but there was a reassuring twinkle in the deep-set eyes.

'There's a churchman present!'

'We play for pins in Santa Barbara,' said Susy sweetly. 'Except that one week-end — you remember, Chuck? We were awfully abandoned. But we put our winnings in the plate!'

'We can do that to-morrow.' Ethel was grateful for the solution.

The bridge-players took their places. Lane looked really ill.

'You must tell me frankly, Percy,' Ethel was saying, as she moved toward the door, '*just* what you think. You know what a privilege I feel it is to have your opinion ——' As they passed from the living-room Matthew turned to Susy.

'How about the terrace?' he asked gravely. 'It's nicer at night.'

'I'll get a wrap.' She was gone in a moment. Not an instant's hesitation. The evening was his.

It wasn't so clear to him, a few minutes later, just what he would do with it. The terrace was lovely in the dusk of the starlight. Susy strolled silently to the balustrade and drew in a great breath of the warm sea-scented air. Matthew could smell the eglantine,

invisible in the darkness. It was very still. The little waves, three hundred feet away across the unseen gardens, whished softly on the shingle. They sounded, in their rhythmic rise and fall, like the very breath of the ocean.

'It's beautiful,' said Susy.

'Yes,' answered Matthew a bit uncertainly, 'it's beautiful.' It seemed so to-night.

'So is Santa Barbara,' said Susy.

There was a little pause.

'It's nice,' said Susy, 'to live your life in lovely places.'

Another pause. — Then:

'Don't you think so?' asked Susy.

'Places aren't everything,' murmured Matthew.

'No,' said Susy practically, 'but they are a great deal. They make up for lots of other things.'

'But not for everything,' said Matthew. 'Look out! That railing's wet with dew.'

'I don't mind the dew,' said Susy, sinking down on the balustrade. 'Aren't the glowworms sweet?'

'Yes,' said Matthew almost savagely. 'Do you have *them* in Santa Barbara?'

'I don't think we do,' said Susy demurely.

'That's too bad. They make up for so much.'

'Matthew,' said Susy severely, 'don't tell me that you have fallen into that easy error of being sorry for yourself.'

'Susan, I fear I have.'

'Snap out of it, Mat,' said Susy lightly. 'It doesn't get you anywhere.'

'Oh, I've learned that.'

'Besides, what have you to be sorry for?'

'Can't you see?'

'Frankly, I can't. It all seems most exceptionally attractive.'

'Oh — attractive!' said Matthew.

'Mat,' said Susy earnestly, 'don't be ridiculous. You're a lucky man. It's all come true. Everything we wished for on the wishing gate, seventeen years ago. There hasn't been a slip. You left that little town as unapplauded as Dick Whittington himself. But when you first walked into the Columbia Medical School didn't you hear the chimes ringing over your head "Turn again, Matthew Martin! Director of the Pierrepont Institute!"'

'I certainly didn't. And I'm not Director.'

'You will be Monday. I read it in the "Times." Oh, Mat, it *was* like a fairy tale. Your industry and its reward. Your magnificent research. Your meeting with the fairy princess.'

'Oh,' said Matthew shortly, 'it's your idea, too, that it's because of *her* that I'm stepping into half the kingdom?'

'Mat! How can you? You know it isn't! You'd have had it anyway. She's thrown in for good measure. I just meant — she's so lovely.'

'Oh, yes, Ethel's lovely.'

'And your children, Mat? I adore children. Perhaps because I've never had any. How old are they?'

'Eleven and twelve.'

'Where are they? I haven't seen either of them.'

'They're in camp. An Adirondack camp, cleverly designed to protect the little daughters of the rich from the decadent influences of their home environment.'

'Don't you miss them?'

'Not much. I haven't seen them here, you know, since they were out of the sand pile. Long Island's bad for children.'

'But in winter, Mat?'

'In winter they're in school in the Berkshires. Park Avenue's bad for children.'

'Do they look like you?'

'They look like Ethel's father. It's not an unmitigated blessing.'

'Mat, you're simply incorrigible. You're determined not to be sentimental.'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that,' said Matthew.

'Don't be immoral, Mat,' protested Susy lightly. 'There are proper and improper subjects for sentiment.'

'That's just what I was thinking,' said Matthew.

She met his ardent gaze quite coolly.

'Me, myself, I'm a realist,' declared Susy firmly.

'You don't go in for sentiment?'

'Not any longer.' She turned her head to gaze out over the invisible garden. 'I took my line, you know, one night in an Indiana cornfield.'

'Susy — Susy, look at me!' He dropped on the balustrade beside her. 'You've been happy?'

'Oh, utterly,' said Susy. 'Isn't every one?' She didn't turn her head.

'Chuck's given you everything. Everything I didn't have to give!'

'Yes. Just that.'

'Money — opportunity — travel ——'

'Yes, indeed, Mat. Saint George's in Hartford. Saint Stephen's in Providence. The Advent in Baltimore ——'

'I'm not joking. A setting for your beauty. A life in lovely places.'

She turned at last to look at him. Her lips were tremulous, but her bravado did not falter.

'You don't know the half of it, Mat! You should see the Episcopal Palace in Santa Barbara! His mother loves it.'

'How is Mrs. Dayton?'

'Oh — incredibly the same. I mean — she still thinks as highly of Chuck.'

'What mother wouldn't? Chuck's charming.'

'Almost too charming.'

'Susy — you're not worried? About Chuck — and women?'

'Perish the thought, Mat. He doesn't mean it. He doesn't mean anything.'

'He's a distinguished prelate.'

'And the ladies' choice! But his face is his fortune.

He would never have been made Coadjutor of Delaware if it weren't for his nose!'

This was somehow dreadful. But he couldn't help laughing. Laughing with Susy — about her husband! They should both be above it. But he didn't seem her husband. He was just — Chuck. And Susy was mocking him. As she'd always mocked him. Now that he and Susy were together again, everything was just as it used to be. They two — against the world. Seeing life eye to eye. Things that were funny. Things that were tragic. Things that could be so lovely if ——

'Matthew,' said Susy firmly, 'if you'd married me we should still be in Connersville.'

'I'd be a country doctor,' murmured Matthew dreamily. 'We'd be living on Main Street.'

'And how you'd hate it!' said Susy.

'How you'd hate me,' said Matthew. 'For not being more — adequate.'

'I wonder,' said Susy. 'I'm an excellent hater.'

'We'll never know.'

'No.' Susy rose abruptly. 'We'll never know. I'm going in, Mat.' She held out her hand. He seized it eagerly. 'This talk is — foolish. We made our beds ——'

'And now we lie in them.'

'They're feather beds,' said Susy brightly. 'That's something, anyway.'

'Susy, we were fools.'

'No, Mat. We were young. Let me go in without you. I'm somehow — tired.'

'Susy, we didn't understand. We didn't understand *any*thing. Life — or ourselves ——'

'I'm not so sure,' said Susy, 'about that. Perhaps we did. Good-night.' And so she left him.

She didn't come down next morning until the limousine stood at the door to take the Bishop to the eleven o'clock service.

'Now, Jocelyn, get that bridge table out of sight before we come home,' Ethel was saying nervously, as Susy appeared on the staircase. Susy, perfectly cast as the Bishop's wife, demurely attired in dove gray, her gloved hands holding hymnal and prayer book. She hadn't even a glance for Matthew. Jack was kidding the Bishop on his gains of the previous evening. Jocelyn was slipping three crisp bills into his hand.

'If this is like other country parishes,' Susy commented pleasantly, 'that will startle the rector.'

'We've the dearest little church,' said Ethel vaguely. 'Rather Gothic. All ivy, you know. Or perhaps it's woodbine. But the interior is disappointing. I noticed it last week at the Morgan wedding, and I thought of you, Percy. You wouldn't like to come and take a look at it now?'

Matthew smiled as he observed there were limits to Percy Devereaux's devotion.

'My line's not Gothic,' said Percy firmly. 'The only churches in America are the old New England

meeting-houses. There's a Sir Christopher Wren steeple in Framingham, Massachusetts ——'

'We mustn't be late,' said Susy sweetly, and stepped into the limousine. Ethel followed with Chuck. The car moved off in the morning sunshine.

Jocelyn turned to Picks on the threshold. 'The bridge table, Picks. On the terrace. Will you play, Matthew?'

'I can't,' said Matthew briefly. 'My mail's piled up. You are four without me.'

'If we can find Denis,' said Jocelyn crossly. 'He's mooning in the garden. Go and retrieve him, Percy. That's a dear!'

Jocelyn safely established, with Denis a gloomy captive, Matthew entered his study and firmly closed the door. He had made a discovery and the state of his emotions amazed him For Matthew was inured to discovery, yet he hadn't slept a wink all night. Or hardly a wink. He had watched the sun rise. He hadn't done that since the early days of his research. Before he had married he had often spent a night in the Institute and seen the unearthly pallor of approaching dawn creep over the laboratory, dimming the radiance of his student's lamp. Turned, suddenly stiff and tired, from his test tubes to go to the window and catch the yellow sunlight just gilding the tops of the skyscrapers. The street was always hushed and empty at that early hour. The traffic still asleep.

Though recognition came later, that was the time he had done his best work. Thrilled by the night's chase of the elusive cancer bug, sometimes he hadn't slept at all. Just stepped into Child's for a cup of black coffee with wheat cakes and syrup, and hurried back to his boarding-house for a cold plunge and a clean collar before returning to the lab for the work of the day. Elfborg did that still sometimes.

And this night, like those other breathless nights of revelation, had gone before he really knew it. Rehearsing the talk on the terrace, thinking of what she'd said, and meant, and hadn't said. Of what he'd say to-morrow. For Susy was unhappy. That was the great discovery. Funny he'd never thought of it, down the years.

Astounded he'd been, of course, when she wrote him that she was going to marry Chuck. But yet he'd understood. Chuck played the waiting game. And Chuck had money. Money, which he and Susy had so clearly explained to each other in that Indiana cornfield, was what they couldn't, being what they were, get on without.

'I've been poor as a church mouse all my life and I want to *have* things.' So Susy had proclaimed. 'And you do, too, Mat. The world's your oyster. If you ever want to get out of your father's hardware store, you'll have to leave me. We both hate Connersville. We'd come to hate each other. Take your chance now. I'll wait for mine.'

Chuck was her chance, once he was safely established in Hartford, Connecticut. Matthew had seen that clearly. It hadn't worried him much at the time. There was nothing he could do about it. He hadn't two nickels to rub together in his pocket. He'd been distracted then by his own problems. Old Pierrepont had taken him up. Asked him to dinner. And he'd met his daughter.

It was only later, quite a little later, that the memory of Susy returned to haunt his dreams. The significance of his boyish experience grew clearer with the disillusion of the years. He hadn't thought of it, of course, so very often. He'd been too busy. But he'd known for years, now, that he'd lost his chance for happiness. That the single knock of opportunity had fallen on deaf ears.

But Susy's emotions had never intrigued him. He'd assumed that she was happy. She was certainly successful. He would never have to see her. And the Institute was his life.

But now he *had* seen her. And she *wasn't* happy. No happier than he. Success wasn't all it was cracked up to be. Youth should be warned of that.

A flurry on the terrace distracted his attention. Jocelyn and Percy were mirthfully attempting to push the bridge table through the French window.

'Give us a hand, Mat! Don't you hear the limousine? That service didn't last two hours! I don't know what the Church is coming to!'

Luncheon. Then tennis on the perfect courts behind the garden. Chuck, an archangel in flannels, forsaking his clericals for a little healthy play. Jocelyn, vindictively slamming balls at Denis. Susy intercepting them, death and destruction at the net! Then tea, under the pergola. The day was over and she hadn't so much as given him a smile. They'd had their talk, of course. Still — there were things he hadn't said.

The chances were, thought Matthew, that evening as he led the men from the dining-room, that she didn't want to hear them. That was up to her, of course, but, personally, he'd like to get them off his mind. Let himself go for one imprudent moment, tell her his story and have her comfort him a little wistfully. Was it only egotism? A form of vanity? That passionate desire to talk to Susy about — himself.

As the men entered, she rose from the sofa beside Ethel. A daffodil, to-night, in fluttering yellow chiffon. Percy slipped unobtrusively into her place. Jocelyn beckoned the Bishop to a seat beside her.

'Denis, turn on the radio,' said Ethel brightly. 'Schenectady is broadcasting a sacred concert — I think the Bishop would like it. Palestrina, you know — and Bach ——'

Susy advanced very tranquilly to Matthew's elbow.

'I haven't seen the garden,' she said. 'Not really seen it. It must be lovely in starlight.' Her eyes met his. Without a word he turned with her to the door.

They moved in silence across the terrace, down the stone steps and over the smooth lawn to the first dark alleys of the garden. High privet hedges and a grassy path. The odor of sweet alyssum. The pungent scent of marigolds. Vega, overhead, a little west of the zenith. The Pleiades twinkling low in the east. A yellow planet in the southern sky. They reached the rose garden, and Susy turned to the arbor.

'Here, I think,' she said very simply, and sank on a stone seat.

Matthew dropped down beside her, his eyes upon her face.

'It was lovely of you, Susy, to give me this moment.'

'It's my moment, too.'

'You don't know what I've been thinking. All night. All day.'

'Oh, yes, I do, Mat!'

'Susy, *weren't* we fools?'

'We thought we were so wise. I can see that cornfield now, Mat. There was a little hill. Corn shocks against the sky. Pumpkins under foot. Starlight on barbed wire. And the wishing gate.'

'Susy — the pathetic perversity of our wishes!'

'I know, Mat,' she answered miserably. 'And every one came true.'

'We laid our course with such fatal precision. No wind could drive us from it. Susy — why were we so damn practical?'

'Mat, we weren't practical. We were recklessly improvident. We didn't know what we were throwing away.'

'We've lived to learn.'

There was a moment's silence. Now that he had his chance, was this all that he had to say to her? They understood each other perfectly. They always had. What was left for them, now, but understanding? She was sitting quite motionless on the bench beside him. He looked at her tenderly. Susy. The same Susy. So dear. And so near. Did she know what she'd meant to him? He'd really have to tell her. It was almost detachedly, with a sense of impersonal comment, that Matthew broke the little pause.

'Susy — I think I've always loved you.'

She looked up at him quickly.

'Oh, Mat!' Her composure was shattered. 'You haven't? Really?' And suddenly she began to cry.

'Susy!' He groped for her hand in the darkness. 'Susy! Stop! I can't bear it.'

'We have to bear it,' she said between her sobs.

'Why?' Matthew was surprised himself to hear his aggressive monosyllable. It immediately arrested her tears.

'Why? I don't know. I never thought about that.'

'Think now,' said Matthew eagerly. He was conscious of thinking rather rapidly himself. 'We don't have to bear it.' He could hardly believe the words he

heard rushing from his lips. But he had her hands, now, both of them, clasped firmly in his own. 'Unless we're cowards.'

'But we *are* cowards, Mat. We proved that once before.'

'Now we know better.'

'Do we? What if we do? There's nothing to be done about it!'

Somewhere, Matthew felt vaguely, there was an answer to that. He had an odd sensation of playing a rôle. She was looking up at him pitifully. Susy. His Susy. He felt himself sinking in a sea of emotion.

'We have just — to take a train.' It was said! He'd burned his bridges! He felt awfully excited. But Susy's simple inquiry arrested the flame.

'And then?'

'And then we'd have each other.'

'And nothing else, Mat. Have you thought what it would mean?'

Of course he hadn't. — But,

'Certainly,' he said. 'Nothing means anything but you.'

'To-night, perhaps. But what about to-morrow. What about the Institute, Mat?' Susy was getting herself in hand again. 'The son-in-law of the founder really couldn't run off with the wife of the Bishop of Santa Barbara without creating a certain stir. It would cause comment.'

'Damn the Institute!' He meant it, now, with all his heart. 'We'd marry later.'

'You wouldn't marry *me*, Mat. Chuck doesn't recognize divorce.'

'Damn Chuck!'

'I sometimes have, Mat, in my black heart. But that doesn't prevent his holding the trump card.'

'We'd go abroad.'

'What about research?'

'Europe's the cradle of research. We'd live in Vienna.'

'Yes. I can just see us. In lodgings in Vienna. With an occasional holiday at Biarritz or Dinard. You — Matthew Martin! You — and your mistress!'

The word stung him to protest.

'Susy! Don't! We're not like other people! I've really had you always — in my heart. I came before Chuck. You came before Ethel. We belong to each other. We always have.'

Susy looked at him wistfully. Her face was white in the starlight.

'I haven't the courage. I know myself too well.'

'You don't know what I could teach you.'

'Oh, Mat!' Her voice was breathless. She leaned gently toward him. 'Teach me now, Mat. Just for a moment.'

He took her in his arms. All doubts were swept away. He knew instantly he would never let her out of them.

'Mat!' she whispered softly. And again, 'Oh, Mat — my dear!'

'You'll come?'

The head upon his shoulder made a movement of assent.

'You'll not regret?'

'What is there to regret?'

'Only — the world.'

'The world!' said Susy with a little disparaging laugh of happiness. 'A world — well lost for love! I'll not regret!'

He sealed her promise with a lover's kiss. The folly of the past was wiped away. He was entering into his own at last. Opportunity, in pity, had knocked again.

The clock on the Italian staircase was striking three in the morning when Matthew awoke to a feeling of vague disquietude from his first untroubled sleep. What was there on his mind? Oh, of course — the Institute. Elfborg. That adjourned Board meeting. Those incalculable trustees. It was all very well for Jocelyn to say it was all over but the shouting, but you never *could* tell until the vote was announced. Elfborg was a very good man. He'd make an able Director. He knew what research was. He'd done distinguished work himself. Elfborg's wife was a sensible woman. Elfborg had no distractions. Distractions? Matthew was fully awake by this time. Distractions? The events of the evening rose up be-

fore him with appalling clarity. Good God, he'd forgotten Susy! Susy, who had reëntered his life.

Matthew lay motionless on his quattrocento bedstead, his eyes staring blindly into the darkness overhead. Susy. He'd forgotten Susy. Quite an oversight, all things considered. Of course, Susy settled everything. There was no need to worry any longer about the directorship. He would resign from the Institute to-morrow. Or the next day. No, to-morrow. What would he say? 'For urgent personal reasons?' What would the trustees think? What would Elfborg? Ah, well, what difference did it make? They'd have food enough for thought in a day or two.

And then what would he do? What *was* the first thing to be done? Get passage on some steamer? Write his colleagues in Vienna? Get together his resources at the bank?

His resources? That was a chilling thought. His resources. What *were* his resources? All in all he supposed he could realize about seventeen thousand dollars from his investments. He'd lived high since he'd married Ethel, and he'd always been scrupulous about meeting his own bills. Bought his own cars and books and pictures. Kept up with scientific publications. Made his tailor his own affair. His print collection, now, in the Park Avenue apartment — thousands, really, had gone into that. And he'd given Ethel a handsome jewel or two. She didn't need

them, but it kept up his self-respect as the steel king's son-in-law.

What was the exchange, now, in Vienna? Had they stabilized the currency? Alfred Adler had said last winter, he remembered, that living was very high. What was that preposterous story old Morgan was telling him last week at the wedding? Two million krönen he'd paid, once, for a single dinner on the Ring-Strasse? Something like that.

Of course, he'd get a job. No doubt about that. In some laboratory, somewhere. He could transplant his research. He'd take his findings with him. They were inalienable. His work was well known on two continents. He'd get a good job. Nevertheless, it would mean, in a sense, beginning all over again. Without the resources of the Institute behind him. There was nothing like *them*, of course, anywhere else in the world.

And Elfborg would be Director. Well, he deserved it. Though he had no executive brilliance. Elfborg was the scientist, pure and simple. His place was at the microscope. Nevertheless, of course, a sound man. Elfborg had certainly played to luck. Fancy Susy — loading the dice for old Elfborg, at just this critical juncture. Life was certainly queer.

Susy. A life with Susy. He was barely forty. Not too old, of course, to make a new beginning. Why, he felt he'd hardly laid the foundations of accomplishment. His best period was still ahead of him. Two

decades, maybe three, of constructive work. Thirty years with Susy. In Vienna. On seventeen thousand dollars.

A cold sweat broke out on Matthew's brow. Susy was adorable. The fulfillment of his dreams. He'd never forget her happy little face turned up to him in the starlight. Susy was glamour. Susy was romance. But she *did* look awfully expensive. Quite as expensive as Ethel. And Susy was distinctly demanding. Susy never had any patience with anything but success.

Matthew sprang from his bed in an agony of apprehension. He could never keep her happy. Not on seventeen thousand dollars. Not after what she'd had.

He gulped a drink of water from his enameled thermos. What had he taken on? How had it ever happened? When he'd started out for that garden, he hadn't the slightest idea of any irrevocable action. He'd played with fire. And he'd burnt his fingers. His fingers? Matthew felt his entire person was already a charred ember. Why, he could hardly remember their conversation. Just its fatal end. And Susy's face in the starlight. Its happiness. And trust.

Matthew walked to his window and looked out over the geometric gardens. The moon had risen, the waning moon, kindling the ripples on the Sound to silver fire, casting the shadows of the elm trees black

upon the grass. How beautiful it was! How very beautiful! He might never see it again, looking just like that. A lovely place to live. A lovely place to come home to after the week's work at the Institute.

Matthew sat long at his window, contemplating his serene and silvery world. The moon was high in the heavens before he returned, with a heavy sigh, to his quattrocento bed. The inconstant moon, so lovely and so unreliable, dominating the sky, dimming effectively, if temporarily, the radiance of the fixed stars.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when Matthew, consumed with shame, ran down the Italian staircase. He had promised to meet Susy in the rose garden at nine. After his nocturnal vigil he had slept late. What could he say? How could he explain to her? It was certainly an inauspicious beginning for illicit romance.

No one in the hall. No one in the living-room. No one on the terrace but Jack, lost in the pages of the morning 'Times.' Denis, alone on the pier, gazing pensively out over the waste of waters. Matthew lingered by the balustrade, glancing a trifle apprehensively toward the garden. Was Susy still waiting in its bosky alleys?

'Matthew?' It was Ethel's voice. He turned quickly to see her standing in the French window leading to his study. Devereaux was dimly visible on the hearthrug beyond. 'Matthew, come here a minute. Percy thinks if we just ripped out these

bookcases ——' Matthew turned dumbly to enter the room. Bookcases! At such a moment! 'And put them over there, where they'd balance with the fireplace —— Oh, here are two telegrams that came for you this morning.'

She picked the yellow envelopes from off his desk. Matthew took them with trembling fingers. Telegrams! From the Board, of course! The directorship was decided. Forgetting Ethel, forgetting Percy, forgetting even Susy, Matthew walked blindly, unsteadily, out on the terrace. He opened the first envelope.

At twelve-thirty last night, after four hours of discussion, you were unanimously elected Director of the Institute. Official notification from Board of Trustees will follow. I am proud and happy. Love and congratulations to you and Ethel. PETER PIERREPONT

Unanimously elected Director of the Institute! Tears rose in Matthew's eyes. Why — why — he hadn't really known, with all his worry, how much he had wanted it! Poor old Elfborg! But he'd see Elfborg through! He'd see he got every damn cent he wanted for that infantile research. Elfborg would have every chance. He'd see to that. Suddenly Matthew realized that, of course, he wouldn't. He was resigning. Resigning that very day. Good God! Why, he *couldn't* resign! He simply couldn't. Not now. But he must. He was committed irrevocably. Committed to Susy.

'What's the wire?' said Ethel tranquilly, at his elbow.

Jack cast aside the 'Times.'

'Oh, you down, Ethel? Where's the Bishop?' he asked. 'I haven't seen him this morning.'

'The Bishop?' Ethel's voice was vague. Her mind was on the telegram. 'Oh, his wife carried him off on the eight o'clock train.' Matthew wheeled to stare at her in stupefaction. 'She woke me up to apologize for running off so early. It seems she thought at the last moment she didn't have just the right frock for that Tuxedo wedding to-morrow. She went in to New York to pick up another. She was so sorry not to see you again, Matthew. But she wouldn't have you waked.'

Matthew stood rooted to the terrace, gazing incredulously at Ethel's placid face.

'She's gone?' he said. 'She's gone — without a message?'

'Just good-bye.'

Matthew's eye fell upon the second telegram. He tore it open with fumbling fingers. It was sent from the local railroad station and it was just like Susy. Brief, impulsive, and indiscreet.

Can you ever forgive me? For being a coward?

SUSY

For being a coward? Susy put things so damn clearly. She looked life in the eye. For being a cow-

ard. That was what he was, of course. Nothing more admirable. Still, cowardice had its compensations.

Matthew's steady glance wandered from the message in his hand to the tranquil scene before him. The perfect lawn, the geometric gardens, stretched fresh and fair under a cloudless sky. The little Sound waves curved and glittered along his five-hundred-foot frontage. The figures of the three gardeners could be discerned in the middle distance, bent in some useful toil. It was settled. His suspense was over. He was Director of the Pierrepont Institute. Unanimously elected. His nightmare was as if it had never been.

Matthew drew in a great breath of the eglantine-scented fragrance of the Italian terrace. Why — he had kept everything. Even Susy's illusions. He must send her a beautiful telegram. There was only one Susy. But — could he ever forgive her?

Well, frankly, he could.

SHIRTSLEEVES TO SHIRTSLEEVES

SHIRTSLEEVES TO SHIRTSLEEVES

When Hiram Baxter, at the age of twenty-one, shook the dust of Kingston Corners, New Hampshire, from his feet forever, his fellow townsmen certainly experienced no pang of clairvoyant regret. Hiram was judged by all a conspicuous failure. An ornery boy. A real cross to Si and Sally. Not like his younger brother Ezra, who was already really running the local post-office for his Uncle Jonathan, who had held from time immemorial the distinction of that federal post. Not even like his sister Emma, who, married to Benny Bradley of East Kingston at eighteen, had already, at twenty-four, two bright youngsters under foot in the kitchen and two more buried in the little cedar-shaded graveyard beside the Congregational Church. Emma's reputation for pickled crab-apple rivaled her mother's. She was a real helpmeet for Benny, who was getting up in the world, doing well with the farm, and putting money by, it was said, every year, in spite of the demands of their growing family.

But Hiram was queer. Hiram never took to anything. Silas had certainly put up with a lot from him all those years in the general store. Sally made out he was just a dreamer. Sally kind of favored Hiram. Mothers were often curiously partial to the runt of a

litter. 'He's got somethin' in him,' she always maintained, 'that's different.'

'Well, Silas,' said the Congregational minister, 'he'll never make a storekeeper. That's certain. Why don't you educate him? Send him to Exeter. Only ten miles away.'

But Hiram didn't want education. Not education at Exeter at any rate. Hiram wanted only one thing. To put Kingston Corners behind him forever. To see the last of that little green common, dominated by the white façades of the town hall, the schoolhouse and the three wooden churches. To hear no more the village gossip of the women standing on the doorstep of his Uncle Jonathan's post-office, the tall stories of the men sitting on the cracker barrels of his father's corner store, the admonitory references to the thrifty virtues of Ezra, Ben, and Emma, slipped craftily into the conversation by his father around the family lamp of an evening. Hiram only wished never to see again that peculiar waggle of Si's gray chin whiskers as he waxed particularly profound and paternal, sitting back in his shirtsleeves in the old mahogany rocker, while Sally washed up the supper dishes, luxuriously abandoning himself to the inalienable parental privilege of getting off axiomatic advice.

Hiram was mulish, but Hiram was silent. Only when his mother's brother, his unknown Uncle Samuel, had died in Burlington, Vermont, unexpectedly

leaving one hundred dollars apiece to Sally's three children, did he become articulate.

'I've got the money and I'm twenty-one,' he said briefly, 'and I'm going West.'

'Well, good riddance to bad rubbish,' said the inhabitants of Kingston Corners, when they had finally recovered from the original shock of the revelation. 'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But a rolling stone gathers no moss, and it's dollars to doughnuts that Si and Sally will just have to be paying out good money to get him back here when he finds out that living on the frontier among the red Indians ain't any cure for natural born laziness!'

'Better let him go, Silas, better let him go,' said the Congregational minister.

But it was Sally who, in her practical feminine way, cut the Gordian knot of Silas's indecision. 'Well, how d'you calculate to keep him, Si?' she asked incisively.

It always tickled Hiram Baxter in later years to remember his unapplauded departure from his native town. He told my father all about it with appreciative chuckles, forty years afterward, when he was consulting him about the deed of gift for the Sally Bailey Baxter Memorial Library for that little village green. Kingston Corners had long since come to regard him as her favorite son. His spectacular career served to point a moral and adorn a tale to inspire the flagging diligence of the grandchildren and great-

grandchildren of the townsfolk who had wagged their wise heads over his unceremonious departure.

Hiram had always been generous to Kingston Corners, if he'd never cared much to transplant any portion of it to Chicago. Emma had visited him there, once, just after he'd lifted the mortgage from Ben's farm, and had come home with incredible stories of his brownstone palace on a street appropriately named Prairie Avenue, though Emma hadn't seen an Indian and pronounced the prairies quite twenty miles distant from the city center. She was never invited to repeat her visit.

Hiram, however, made periodic descents on Kingston Corners. He stopped at the hotel in Haverhill, six miles away, and drove over in the hired grandeur of a livery surrey, to pay his respects to his ageing mother and sentimentalize a little over the white schoolhouse and the shabby little homestead just off the village green. He never stayed more than a day or two, but he always sent Sally magnificent presents. Yards and yards of uncut black taffeta and Paisley shawls, and once a quilted dolman with black ball fringe, from New York City, the like of which Kingston Corners had never seen before.

All these tributes Sally received in mute amazement, displayed to the villagers, and promptly packed away in a little horsehair trunk in her attic, where, years afterward, at the time of her death, they were discovered in all their pristine freshness by Hiram

and promptly handed over to Emma to do with as she would.

Hiram sent Emma's boys and girls through Amherst and Holyoke and saw that Ezra's only son, young Silas, an ambitious lad, went to Exeter and Dartmouth and the Harvard Law School and settled down to a good practice in his Great-Uncle Samuel's circle in Burlington, Vermont. Hiram even bought Uncle Samuel's house for young Silas when it was slipping out of the family through the impecunious fingers of a spinster cousin. Said he was glad to do it in return for that original one hundred dollars that took him out to God's country. Hiram tidied up the family lot in the Congregational cemetery, trimmed the cedars, installed a new stone coping, equipped the ancestral connection with brand-new headstones and put up an irreproachable shaft to Silas in the center. Sally lived to be indeed confirmed in her original diagnosis of Hiram as 'different.'

The minister's intuition, on the other hand, did not prove so infallible. For, after all, despite his early failures in the general store, Hiram survived to be acclaimed as the prince of storekeepers. Arriving in Chicago in the early seventies, on the crest of the business boom that followed the fire, all his worldly possessions in one small carpetbag and fifty dollars' worth of capital in the vest pocket of his only suit, Hiram had immediately taken a hall bedroom in a South Side boarding-house and a job in the shoe

department of Warner's department store on Lake Street.

Hiram's latent talent, that had remained so obstinately in bitter, blighted bud in the pale New England sunshine of Kingston Corners, bloomed and blossomed miraculously in the hothouse of metropolitan life. For the stirring existence that was carried on with such enterprise and courage in the very ashes of the great fire struck the determined young New-Englander as excessively metropolitan.

At the end of six months he had doubled his slender salary and was acting as assistant floorwalker on the main aisle. In three years he was head buyer for the establishment, incredibly making semiannual trips to New York City, imposing on Old Warner his newfangled ideas of expansion and progress. In ten, as junior partner, he was engineering and partly financing the building of the new brick store on State Street, introducing into the dry-goods world of Chicago his iconoclastic theories of extended charge credits and his subversive slogan, 'The customer is always right,' upon which Warner and Baxter's subsequent national reputation really rested.

In the meantime he had married Clara Warner and was living in a two-story wooden house on Wabash Avenue, with a cow in the back yard, a pair of bay horses in the stable, and three bouncing babies in the nursery. It was at this period of his life that my father, himself a young lawyer only six years out of

Cambridge, first knew him. He always said that, even then, with Old Warner still living and keeping his eye pretty close on the business and his hand pretty tight on the purse strings, Hiram suffered from delusions of grandeur. Had his dynastic ideas from the very start of founding a family that would amount to something in this new country that Hiram had taken so wholly and unreservedly to his starved New England heart.

'My boys are going to have advantages that I never had,' he said when Hiram Junior and little Warner were barely toddling. 'They're going to have a running start in life. They're going to have a good Harvard education, and then they're going to come back here and learn the business from the ground up. Why, if they have the sense to profit by their advantages, they ought to own a quarter of the city before they die.'

This brave voicing of Hiram's ambition, I know, falls a little crudely on modern ears. But if our latter-day sentimental ideals of service were foreign to Hiram's practical point of view, he had at least no soft illusion that you could get something for nothing in this work-a-day world. He expected his boys, decidedly, to sing for their supper, to work hard, to live virtuously, and, incidentally, to serve the city while they shaped its destinies to serve themselves.

But it was on Bella, his first born, that Hiram's affectionate ambitions were really centered. Bella

was my contemporary, and, truly, she was from the very beginning a lovely child. My first recollection of the little Baxters goes back to a dancing class of the early eighties. I have still a vague memory of Hiram Junior and little Warner, sticking their small red tongues out of their ruddy, freckled faces (the boys had both, unfortunately, inherited Hiram's auburn hair), protesting against the ignominy of Little Lord Fauntleroy suits of claret-colored velveteen with Irish lace collars.

But Bella took to grandeur like a duck to water. Her floating curls, that were like a golden apotheosis of her mother's fair, flat plaits, and her crisp plaid taffeta ruffles were the despair of all parents of tomboys like myself. She fluttered about in her short scalloped skirts like an imprisoned butterfly in the tiny third-floor ballroom of her grandfather's new house on Cass Street. It was one of the first brownstone houses to go up after the fire and it contained Chicago's first private ballroom, tucked away amid the servants' quarters under its mansard roof. The intricate star pattern of its parquet flooring was the marvel of all beholders.

Bella was the apple of Old Warner's eye, and Hiram's sun really rose and set in her. Hiram Junior and little Warner might be destined to carry on the business and own a quarter of the city, but Bella was the Princess Royal. It was to her that Hiram always looked to preserve the dynasty and produce

the Prince of Wales. Bella was the fine flower that adorned the tall tree of his industry. Her children would be the solid fruit that would justify and reward his life of sacrifice and labor.

When Bella was ten, Hiram tore down the old house, built a block of stores on the site, and moved his family to the brownstone palace on Prairie Avenue. Old Warner, it was said at the time, advised buying North Side property. Offered to give him the empty lot next door to his own new house on Cass Street. But Hiram, fed up perhaps with good advice in office hours, preferred to keep the river rolling between himself and his wife's father.

He installed a ballroom that rivaled Old Warner's, and then, for good measure, added a peculiar protuberance to his golden-oak dining-room that was something more than a bay window, yet less than a conservatory, where Clara kept palms and branching rubber plants and a mute canary in a huge gilded cage. There was a stained-glass window, too, set in above the mahogany wainscoting of the stair landing, that we children always thought was very fine and were taught to refer to as 'Gothic.' Even now the memory of that dim hallway, with those purple, blue, and scarlet panes confusedly staining the yellow sunlight of a late Chicago afternoon, has for me a quality of affluent romance that Chartres itself has never rivaled.

Bella was sixteen at the time of the World's Fair.

Hiram was a prominent backer of the proposition from the very first, and Clara became an inconspicuous member of the Board of Lady Managers. Hiram, though only forty-three years old, was already recognized as one of the big men in the little city. A prominent member of the Chicago Club and the real power behind the throne at Warner and Baxter's. He'd picked up a good many corner lots of downtown real estate, too, and it was said he'd never guessed wrong on any business proposition.

Now, in a burst of affluence, and rather under the frown of Old Warner's disapproval (there was never anything showy about Old Warner), he set up his coach and four and drove many hilarious parties down to the Fair Grounds in the course of that delirious summer of '93. There was never anything showy about Clara, either, but still, impeccably gowned in flowing lavender taffeta, with her little tiptilted sunshade and her tiny flowered toque of purple pansies perched above her flaxen plaits, she did very well on top of the coach. Bella always rode on the box seat beside her father, her blue eyes dancing with pleasure and her really remarkable golden hair blowing back behind her in the summer breeze.

Bella did up her hair that autumn and let down her skirts and went to Farmington. It was the first break in our intimacy. My mother counted on the stricter régime at Dobb's Ferry to correct my hoydenish manners. But we picked it all up again two years

later, when I poured the chocolate amid the chrysanthemums in the golden-oak dining-room at her coming-out tea and joined the tulle-clad ranks of her eight bridesmaids when she married Clarence Carter amid the roses in the Second Presbyterian Church.

It was rather a blow to Hiram to have Bella marry at eighteen, but there was, on the other hand, a certain solid satisfaction in cementing an alliance with Old John Carter, president of the Chicago Club, owner of half South Water Street, and head of the wholesale grocery that bore his name. Clarence was his third son, a nice boy, not long out of Yale, safely employed dispensing the paternal groceries, destined to inherit a tidy little fortune, well-dressed and mild-mannered, obviously the type that would never make trouble for Bella or any one else. Twenty years of strategic dealing with Clara's father in every domestic and professional crisis had induced in Hiram a frame of mind which welcomed, rather than deplored, the advent of a son-in-law whose intellectual equipment seemed to promise a dearth rather than a wealth of opinion in crises of any nature.

Clara outdid herself in planning the wedding. It was the big event of Easter Week. And Hiram took solid satisfaction in joining with Old John Carter in the purchase of the little brick house on Astor Street to house the gorgeous outlay of wedding presents and, incidentally, the young married pair. Bella followed the modern taste in preferring a North Side

residence. The trend of fashion was setting in north of the river. Hiram had to acknowledge that Old Warner's advice on residential property, given so freely in the middle eighties, had been sound for once. Not that he wanted to live on Cass Street. But he rather envied John Carter his gray stone mansion on the Drive, overlooking the lake beyond the strip of parkway with its young, spindly elms and the terminal boundary of the cement sea-wall.

The next few years, however, were full of satisfactions for Hiram. In the first place, he buried Old Warner, with every decorous expression of outward bereavement and every sympathetic acquiescence in Clara's extravagant grief. Warner and Baxter's, so long the preoccupation of his every daylit hour, became from that moment peculiarly his own, the supreme reason for his being, the outward and visible sign of his inward and spiritual faith.

In the second, Bella promptly produced his first grandchild, little Claribel, sentimentally named for her mother and grandmother. Claribel was my godchild. As I held the little mite, half buried in muslin and Valenciennes lace, before the tall gold-framed mirror that stood between the two front windows of Hiram's Prairie Avenue drawing-room, I felt that the majesty of the assembled Baxters and the glory of the Carter clan, turned out in full regalia for the occasion, completely dwarfed the little Presbyterian minister and the significance of the simple ceremony performed

at the improvised font. I shared, at the moment, all Hiram's delusions of grandeur, was every inch a duchess, holding reverently in my arms the hope of a nation, experienced the complete illusion of assisting at a royal fête.

If Hiram felt any dynastic disappointment in the sex of the baby, it was promptly forgotten in the joy of anticipating the growth and development of a second little Bella. The granddaughter, too, displayed an endearing resemblance to himself. By the end of her third month, the ruddy tint of the fuzz that topped her little bald head was quite unmistakable. Long before her first birthday the child was adorably crowned with a fiery mass of auburn curls.

About this time Hiram Junior first swam into public recognition. Young Hiram was doing very well at Harvard. His freshman prowess on the gridiron was worthy of note. He made his class crew that spring and was asked to return to Cambridge in early September for the Varsity football practice. Next year it was bruited about the Chicago streets that young Hiram had made his way into the most exclusive of the Back Bay drawing-rooms. The town was more than half prepared for the dazzling announcement that came some six months later. Young Hiram was the second man born west of the Alleghanies to make the Porcellian Club.

Hiram was beside himself with pleasure. The fact that the vast majority of his fellow citizens had never

heard of the organization in question was no bar to his delight. It was his pleasure and privilege to enlighten them on the esoteric customs of a gilded society on the Atlantic seaboard. When young Hiram returned at Christmas, wearing, modestly, in his crimson necktie, the tiny diamond pig that was the emblem of his distinguished initiation, no man in the Chicago Club could, with any semblance of justice, blame Hiram Senior if he did not instantly recognize that discreet badge of glory.

Young Warner, in the meantime, was developing into something of a problem. Young Warner, at nineteen, was late in getting into college. It was whispered by prudent mothers in Chicago drawing-rooms, when the young ladies of the family were safely withdrawn, that young Warner Baxter was fast.

Hiram faced the situation with something of a reversion to the parental tactics of old Silas in Kingston Corners. He had no gray chin whiskers to waggle at his recalcitrant son and he didn't sit in his shirt-sleeves, of an evening, in an old mahogany rocker. But from the depths of his green morris chair, behind the smoke of his excellent cigar, he insinuated into the conversation admonitory reference to the exemplary conduct of Bella and young Hiram and succumbed, in his turn, to the inalienable parental privilege of getting off axiomatic advice.

Young Warner, as his father before him, was mulish

and silent. Young Warner wanted only one thing. To put Chicago behind him forever. And, partly because his schooling was excellent and partly because departure for Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the easiest immediate means of attaining that single-hearted end, young Warner did finally matriculate and passed into Harvard where the details of his further exploits were at least mercifully concealed from the denizens of Chicago drawing-rooms.

Young Hiram emerged from college about the time that young Warner entered it. He spent a last glorious summer of freedom, I recall, making the grand tour of Europe with a bicycle party of his Harvard classmates. It was the summer of 1900, but his glowing postals from the Paris Exposition awoke in the hearts of the older generation only a gratified conviction of the immense superiority of our own World's Fair of '93. The memory of that celebrated exposition always lingered tenderly in the hearts of the older Chicagoans. It was somehow the coming-out party of their little city, its social début among the great capitals of the world. Chicago washed the adolescent grime from her hands and face and stood, for the moment, naïve and young and hopeful, blushing in white tulle and forget-me-nots, bowing to the plaudits of her sister cities. The first families of the period never forgot the significance of the occasion.

Young Hiram returned in October and entered the offices of Warner and Baxter's with a conscientious

determination to live up to his early promise. Young Hiram thought very well of himself. And small wonder. We all thought very well of him too. The only trouble with his spectacular career in the Harvard Yard was that it made all subsequent experience seem a trifle anti-climactic. Young Hiram's position was rather that of a distinguished ex-president emerging from his third term in the White House, incredibly, at twenty-two. What had life to offer young Hiram that could possibly equal the glory of his last Yale-Harvard game, when he scored three touchdowns for the crimson and became, in an hour, the hero of Boston and the toast of his Alma Mater?

Still young Hiram did very well in Chicago. He satisfied his father completely that first winter in the offices of the department store and achieved a career on the side as a brilliant leader of 'germans.' There was no one who could drag a snakelike line through the intricate mazes of a cotillion figure with the abandon of young Hiram, or pick with such infallible discernment the prettiest débutante to sit in the golden caterer's chair and hold the silver mirror. No party at Kingsley's was complete without him.

Bella, I always thought at just this period, rather envied young Hiram his footloose gayety, his airy social preëminence. After all, she was only two years his senior and after five blameless years of matrimony, in spite of the unflagging devotion of her impeccable Clarence, the charms of her four-year-old

Claribel, and the delights of acting as châtelaine of the little brick house on Astor Street, Bella was entering the winter of her discontent.

Bella was as blonde and as beautiful as ever, and, notwithstanding the ecstasy of her chrysanthemum-bowered début and the romance of her early marriage, Bella was beginning to realize that she had never had what might be legitimately regarded as her 'fling.'

Just about this time, too, Bella lost her second baby, and steadfastly resolved, in the face of all the pain and frustration, never to have another. Hiram, of course, never heard the immodest resolution. In the early days of the century such desperate decisions were not openly discussed with our latter-day freedom. He was greatly disappointed at the loss of a grandson, and always, I am sure, had the comfort of thinking that some obscurely indelicate anatomical barrier explained the unfortunate fact that Bella never presented him with another.

Bella, tied hand and foot by the straight-laced conventions of the young married set in which she moved, looked desperately about for new worlds to conquer. I never heard of her finding them. She managed to sever Clarence from the groceries long enough to take him twice to Europe before she was thirty. Beyond that she filled up her life with a mania for collecting Colonial furniture, and grew to count pathetically on Claribel to provide occupation for her middle years.

She flirted a little, now and then, when she could, with the prosaic husband of some girlhood friend. Our little group felt Bella was quite daring. But, beauty and belle as she had been and, in a more sophisticated society, might have again become, Bella, I am sure, never had the longed-for opportunity of smiling with thrilling invitation or denial into the eager eyes of any man but Clarence. To a cynical spinster like myself, who remembered her in the first rosy flush of youth and expectancy, her crop of wild oats seemed pathetically meager.

For Hiram's comfort and convenience, of course, it was just as well that it was. For Hiram was finding his hands all too full in coping with young Warner. Young Warner, in those halcyon days of academic laxity, repeated his freshman courses at Harvard three successive years, managed to become a sophomore, and then sank for the third time, academically speaking, under the weighty displeasure of assembled deans.

As he left Harvard, in a social sense, with his classmates, the débâcle didn't much matter to young Warner, except that he was fond of his rooms in Cambridge and now had to face the dynastic day when he, in his turn, must occupy a desk in the business offices of Warner and Baxter. He didn't, however, occupy it long. The wear and tear of merely living with Warner in the Prairie Avenue palace became too destructive of family decencies to be long

continued. Hiram's original plan of reformation was simplicity itself.

'You bring him home at night,' he said firmly to young Hiram, 'and you, Clara, get him up in the morning, and leave it to me to make a man of him in the office.' But Warner developed an eel-like dexterity in slipping through young Hiram's fingers in the wee small hours when cotillions were at their height, and Clara could never muster the courage to get him out of his bed before noon.

To Hiram's valiant efforts to immerse him in the cleansing contacts of commerce he opposed a graceful policy of masterly inactivity that reduced his baffled parent to the verge of apoplexy. Twelve months of futile endeavor were enough for Hiram.

'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' he declared to Clara, reverting under bitter provocation, with deplorable crudity, to the coarser speech of Kingston Corners.

Young Warner withdrew from our Middle-Western life in triumph. He took up his residence in New York, where Hiram bought him a seat on the stock exchange and covered his losses down the years with occasional outbursts of protest, varying a sustained policy of taciturn gloom. We heard of him only occasionally, and whenever we did his infamy was his fame. There was an affair with a South American opera singer, half black the story ran, that cost Hiram untold thousands.

But he gradually sank beneath the surface of our perceptions, and finally only the oldest friends of the family ever remembered his existence. He went down with the Lusitania in 1915, and Hiram, with a pathos rare in his practical point of view, always felt that tragic death had made a hero of him. The mere fact that he had died a helpless victim of the German outrage, an unconscious protagonist of the nation's participation in the World War, seemed somehow for Hiram blessedly to redeem the idle futilities of his life.

Notwithstanding his anxieties over young Warner's exploits and his continued disappointment over the possession of only one grandchild, Hiram entered his sixtieth year with a sustaining sense of well-being. He had made of Warner and Baxter's, by this time, just what he wanted. It stood before the world, a granite temple of commerce, lifting its sixteen stories above the marble pillars of its classic entrance, a golden realization of the silent young New-Englander's early dream.

Young Hiram, too, spelled satisfaction with his every gesture. No father could ever have demanded a more adequate son. It was only natural that his sustaining interest in the store's future lacked the glow of passion that had illuminated his father's early endeavor. The founding of Warner and Baxter's on modern principles of salesmanship had been for Hiram a crusade against the dragon prejudices of a

benighted generation. He had carried the torch of progress, with what flaming precision, into the dark places of the commercial world. Not even the ifs and ands, the hems and haws of Old Warner had stemmed his missionary zeal.

Young Hiram, on the other hand, accepted the commercial world as he found it, observed its ground rules, worked steadfastly to get ahead of it, and drew his dividends. This conforming attitude played steadily into his father's hands. For Hiram, too, at sixty, was willing to accept the world as it was. Why not? It was his world. It was as he had made it. Hiram had no fault to find with it. It had served his turn all too well for that.

There came to be, however, as far as young Hiram was concerned, one fly in the ointment, one secret cause for dissatisfaction and dismay. Young Hiram, at thirty-one, seemed still in no haste to marry. I could not possibly define the moment when Hiram's and, above all, Clara's devouring fear that some designing woman would succeed in capturing young Hiram changed subtly, overnight, into the equally consuming conviction that some designing woman wouldn't.

Young Hiram was all too well satisfied with his comfortably established life that rotated between his spacious rooms in the Prairie Avenue palace and his handsomely upholstered offices in the store. His daily luncheons with familiar cronies at the Chicago Club

and his nightly engagements at the festal board of some pretty hostess with no serious designs on his future provided all the relaxation this single-hearted warrior seemed to demand. Hiram waxed distinctly impatient and turned, as always in moments of irritation, on the wife of his bosom.

'You make him too comfortable, Clara,' he declared with annoyance. Clara pondered this charge in her heart with her customary silence. Her days, indeed, for the last fifteen years, since Bella's early marriage, had removed the flutter of girlish gayety from her life, had been entirely spent in making her menfolk comfortable. The charge was not unfounded. But no practical method of meting out discomfort in the home to young Hiram without inflicting the same unwelcome portion on his father occurred to her. And things went on as they were.

Hiram took to emitting autobiographical statements about the evening lamp. He would arrest young Hiram on the threshold as he was starting out for his engagements of the evening, lower the 'Evening Post' and observe oracularly over its margins, 'When I married your mother I was twenty-six years old and I hadn't three thousand dollars in the bank.' Or, 'It's hard for me to realize, Hiram, that, when I was your age, I had three fine children and a house of my own.' These interesting reminiscences fell on deaf ears. They didn't even seem to irritate young Hiram, and his father eventually abandoned them

and fell back on the vain hope that perhaps some day Bella would be blessed with another boy.

Clara would always have preferred to accept her grandchildren from the hands of a daughter-in-law. She cherished all the Victorian illusions on the difficulty of woman's lot in a man-made world. The curse of Eve hung heavy over her head. 'Poor Bella, you know, is expecting,' she always said with heartfelt commiseration on those two interesting occasions in an idle life when poor Bella was.

So it was finally about the little flaming head of Claribel that all Hiram's dynastic dreams came to focus. Claribel was fourteen when Hiram was sixty, and a clever little trick she had become. 'There's nothing,' Bella was wont to say in helpless admiration, 'that child can't do.' There was nothing, certainly, that she couldn't do with Bella. She held her parents in firm subjection to her every caprice, and even Hiram succumbed to the comfortable delusion that she could do no wrong.

I used to see her tearing up and down the Lincoln Park bridle path on her little black mare, discreetly followed by an attendant groom, her mane of auburn curls flying out behind her, curiously reminiscent of the sunshine locks of Bella on the box seat of the old four-in-hand. She used to roller-skate on Astor Street, cannoning into pedestrians with a devastating disregard of the comfort and convenience of the older generation. Play jacks, too, on the sidewalk, sprawled

over the sooty pavement in her dainty frock, volubly laying down the law of the game to her attendant sprites. Many was the time I took to the grassplot rather than step over her, instinctively feeling that no mere godmother and aunt by courtesy could presume to discommode Claribel, even at play.

Bella sent her to Briarcliff in her sixteenth year, and suffered frightfully from the pangs of separation. Next fall she installed her in a school in Florence and spent, herself, a winter in Italy, delight to anticipate, but rather lonely in realization, cooling her heels in Continental hotels, waiting for Claribel to acquire the high polish of European education. Claribel acquired it without difficulty. She picked up the tricks of any trade with such glib facility that it seemed a crying shame that there was nothing on God's green earth of any importance for Claribel to do. No difficulty for her to overcome. No goal to achieve. Nothing for her strong little white teeth to bite upon. Claribel was born with a silver spoon in her mouth and spoon 'vittles' were to be her everlasting portion.

She returned to Chicago in August, 1914, on the wings of the war cloud. Bella never forgave the Germans for timing their descent upon Belgium at such a moment. It prevented her buying Claribel's coming-out wardrobe in Paris. A cross that an innocent non-combatant could hardly be expected to bear in silence. Claribel, however, was born to meet emergencies, and she made out very well with the

modistes of New York and Chicago. She was the furor of her first winter, the idol of her connection, the toast of the town.

Her Uncle Hiram led a reminiscent 'german' at her début ball in the Blackstone, for a few minutes after the elaborate supper, before the riotous younger generation trod him down, ignored the costly cotillion favors, broke from the ranks of his carefully studied 'figures,' and returned to the immoral mazes of the 'Boston dip' and the 'bunny hug,' so deeply deplored at just that period by our more conservative dowagers.

The glory of Claribel's second winter, if possible, dimmed that of her first. She declined the hands of three eligible partis, broke a score of inconspicuous hearts, and enjoyed the three weeks' thrill of a secret engagement with an impecunious young architect, before she tired of him and decided that love in a cottage could never be her line.

That spring she conceived an ambition to go to France to nurse the soldiers, but young Warner's tragic end on the Lusitania only the spring before had given the family a horror of ocean travel that not even Claribel's persistence could overcome. Claribel herself had no desire to sink beneath a watery grave, even in the pursuit of excitement. So, instead, she took a class of young Polish Jews at Hull House, taught them basket-weaving, and accepted the rôle of première danseuse in the Junior League play.

The Polish Jews were soon abandoned, but her success with her friendly audience was so conspicuous that she began to talk vaguely of going on the stage. Nothing but talk ever came of it, greatly to Bella's relief. The very idea filled her with horror. And of course to Hiram the words 'actress' and 'harlot' were absolutely synonymous.

It was an era of war benefits. Plays and pageants were promoted on every hand. Amateur theatricals, bazaars, and tableaux whiled away the better part of Claribel's third year at home. Dancing, singing, and posing, she was always before her little public. Meanwhile the war cloud darkened.

President Wilson's ultimatum caught Claribel on the crest of an affair with a pleasing young bond salesman, the son of a Kansas City packer, who had broken loose from home ties and taken up life in our midst in order to evade the paternal packing house and escape Missouri. He was one of the first men to report for the officers' training camp at Fort Sheridan, and Claribel saw in him a hero.

Ten days after his enlistment she was wearing his solitaire. Bella saw in him a hero, also, and Hiram, after a prudent week spent looking up his father's resources, the hope of a great-grandson. Bella got a great deal of vicarious romance out of the engagement. She always liked Stanley. But Clara thought her grandchild's alliance a trifle beneath her. Clara had inherited all of Old Warner's conservatism. She

had the true caste instinct. The merging of a fortune built solidly, three generations back, on Chicago dry goods and groceries with one derived in the last twenty years from Kansas City pork, an aristocrat like herself could only regard as unfortunate. But Hiram frowned her down. Hiram admired enterprise wherever he found it. And one dollar looked very like another to him.

So Claribel was married under crossed swords in June, 1917. The first large military wedding, it was, that Chicago had ever witnessed. There was hardly a dry eye in the church as she bent her little veiled head under the flashing blades and came down the aisle on Stanley's khaki-clad arm. Her honeymoon began with a romantic three months at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and ended with a tremulous fortnight at Yaphank, Long Island.

When the troop ship had sailed, Claribel joined her parents in Washington. Clarence had been summoned from his groceries by Mr. Hoover to contribute his intricate knowledge on the canned goods situation to the Nation's resources. Bella had taken a large house on Sixteenth Street and furtively rejoiced that the fortunes of war had given her back her daughter.

As soon as the emotional devastation caused by Stanley's departure began to wear off a bit, Claribel began to enjoy Washington, and before the winter was well under way she was enjoying it extremely. Her scorn for Stanley's contemporaries, legitimate

cannon fodder, whom she found occupying with pride the bomb-proof jobs they had obtained through privilege, never abated. But Washington was replete with men, and it was not among her fellow citizens she found her cavaliers. Young embassy attachés circled about her. Britons, with the scarlet splash of the staff uniform on their khaki collars, beguiling Frenchmen in horizon blue, striking Italians in grayish green, dark-eyed Central Europeans in the gay new uniforms of the rapidly forming, rapidly dissolving, Balkan States, an empty sleeve, a cane, a row of medals explaining their presence on the various missions for war and peace that flooded the federal city. Stanley came unscratched through the war. He was eighteen months in France, and when Claribel, on the New York dock, waved gayly up at him at the troop ship's rail, she had a panicky moment of feeling that she was meeting an utter stranger. Life in their Chicago apartment among the newly uncrated wedding-presents seemed very strange to Claribel. But Hiram, at sixty-nine, was glad to see the family reunited once more.

The tranquil régime of domesticity, however, was barely reëstablished when young Hiram, no longer at forty-two conspicuously young, threw a bomb into the family circle. Young Hiram, though he would have blushed to admit it, had found the war a very pleasant interlude in a life dedicated to commerce. Young Hiram's patriotism had taken the form of

liberal subscriptions to Liberty Loans and of stimulating association with the big bankers who were personally interested in providing the sinews of war. He was always on the wing, now in Washington, now in New York, once even in Paris. In the spring of the year 1920 he returned from a Wall Street board meeting with the startling announcement that he was engaged to marry a Russian princess.

Olga Speranska immediately accepted Clara's somewhat tremulous invitation to visit the Prairie Avenue palace. She came out at once to look over the field, and if she spied out the nakedness of the land she never betrayed her disillusion. Four years spent knocking about the pensions of Paris and the boarding-houses of New York, eking out a meager existence by the sale of the family jewels and the hospitality of impressed Americans, had taught Olga Speranska to see life steadily and to see it whole. If her distinguished presence was a little dismaying about the family fireside, her delightful manners disarmed dismay.

She took to Hiram at once. She had with him almost immediately a certain conclusive conversation on the question of a marriage settlement. As the stormy blue eyes of the Slavic princess looked steadily into the twinkling gray ones of the merchant prince, Hiram glimpsed in their steely depths an attitude that he had always admired in man and never before recognized in woman, a steadfast de-

termination to stand by her bargain and to drive a bargain that would be worth the standing by. He concluded young Hiram would be safe in her hands, those long slender hands, adorned by polished nails and her huge emerald engagement ring. Safe — if that was what he wanted. Olga Speranska was brilliant and she was beautiful. Olga Speranska was a Russian princess. And yet — she was forty-seven years old. Five years young Hiram's senior. Three years older than Bella. The bond established between Hiram and his prospective daughter-in-law was never broken, but the last hope of a grandson went glimmering.

Claribel was thrilled by her Russian aunt. Olga regarded Claribel with tolerant amusement as an incredible prodigy of American life. Claribel was thrilled by the post-war dissipations of the Western city. Claribel was successively thrilled by the three apartments, each more magnificent than the last, into which she moved in the first five years of her married life. Claribel was thrilled by the Chicago night clubs, by the possession of her own opera box, by the tiny gold hip flask that Stanley tucked humorously one Christmas into the toe of her stocking. Claribel seemed somehow to subsist on thrills, but Claribel was restless and Claribel was bored.

Hiram could easily have prescribed the remedy. He never lost hope that Clara would come to him with that dynastic announcement. 'Poor little Clari-

bel,' he could hear her beginning. But the announcement never came. Claribel sensed his preoccupation and thought it highly amusing. Time enough for babies, thought Claribel, when all else failed her.

'Can't you do anything about it, Aunt Mollie?' she queried to me gayly, shaking her little red shingled head. 'You're one of the moderns. You're years ahead of Mamma! Can't you tell Grandpa about birth control? It's time he knew the facts of life!'

Claribel was gay, but Claribel was pathetic. Claribel took up the Charleston as a serious avocation. She was its earliest and most earnest advocate. She won a few Charleston contests, appearing incognita at various vaudeville houses, dancing, as it were, as Baron Renfrew! Under the stimulus of that achievement she began to revive, half-heartedly, her talk of a dramatic career. But again it came to nothing.

What was the matter with Claribel? Gradually I became convinced — for her dynastic position intrigued my interest — that nothing less fundamental was the matter with Claribel than a lack of real intellectual equipment, of imagination, of discernment, of taste. I always saw Claribel, you see, as the apex of that shining pyramid that stood firmly rooted on the granite ledges of Kingston Corners, the reason for Hiram's being, the answer to the query mutely propounded by the sum total of his years of unquestioned enterprise and toil.

Here she was, getting on for thirty, prospective heiress of some thirteen million, very charming, a little clever, utterly idle. A world of opportunity and leisure and delight stretched glittering at her feet. Claribel was incapable of the commanding gesture that would make it her own. Or so I thought.

But one wintry day two years ago Bella came to me with the solution. Bella was a bit bewildered, but her face was shining with enthusiasm, for Claribel was happy, Claribel was settled. Claribel, it seemed, was going to open a store. Another whim, I thought lightly. But for once I misjudged her. Misjudged, too, her intellectual equipment. For Claribel has found her métier. Her little shop has been running now for more than two seasons, and it is the very breath of her being. There is nothing wrong with Claribel's intellectual equipment. On the contrary. Claribel has reverted to type.

It is a charming little place, with an interior intensively decorated by Elsie de Wolf. It is a triumph of imagination, of discernment, of taste. The very lines of the looped taffeta curtains at her shop window convey an airy promise of the sophistication and delight within. 'Aux Rêves Réalisées,' she calls it. Olga supplied the name. It was her one cynical protest against the American scene.

Claribel, the prey of some strange atavistic urge, buys and sells there in a state of complete satisfaction. It is full of the most charming little objects

that she imports from Paris. There is a young man from the gem department of the art museum who drops in occasionally to give his opinion, on a shell flower or a bit of jade. Claribel shakes her little red head at him, but I am sure that his admiring presence does not figure much in the scheme of things. The commercial instinct, pure and simple, is sustaining Claribel. She serves tea there every afternoon, and at five o'clock the little shop is always crowded. The friends who sit on her Louis Quinze chairs sustain the conversation at a much higher level, I am sure, than did the loquacious farmers on her great-grandfather's cracker barrels. But — *can't* water rise above its source? I think, whenever I drop in.

Who was the cynic that said shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves was the story of every American dynasty in three generations? Claribel's shirtsleeves are silken, but she sits in them just the same. Hiram, at seventy-six, no longer seeks to understand the world as he sees it. He is still hoping for that great-grandson. If he lives, I think he will see him. Claribel has discovered a purpose in living. In her turn she, too, will become dynastic. She will want to have some one to inherit the stores.

THE EYES OF YOUTH

She ought to keep him waiting. Narcissa knew that. She ought to be out when he arrived and breeze in on him, half an hour later, from some tea or committee meeting, finding him cooling his heels on her little hearthrug, smoking cigarettes in nervous expectation, thinking over what he had to say. Breeze in on him, very casually contrite, laughing lightly:

'My dear! How stupid of me! Did I say five?'

Narcissa could appreciate the glamour of that entrance, weigh the value of the suspense, picture the strategic effect of the belated arrival of a charming hostess, fresh and glowing from the March cold. A brilliant, preoccupied hostess ordering tea, turning up a golden lamp or two, dropping down on the little love-seat before the fire, stripping off her gloves, holding her hands out to the smouldering flame and asking, with a barely perceptible glance at the clock:

'Well, Dick, old dear, what is it that you want of me?'

That glance at the clock, alone, would make him wonder if the doorbell were about to ring again, or if only the prospect of an opera dinner party recalled the irrevocable flight of time.

Narcissa knew all that. She understood the art of

living. And she understood Dick. That was the type of treatment that would intrigue him. Dick had no interest in slavish devotion. Not that Dick had any interest whatever in her devotion, slavish or otherwise. Any more.

Not even his note, crashing into her life after an interval of five long years, could shake Narcissa's cynical certainty on that point. But still he had written. 'I want to see you, Cissy. I have something to tell you that only I can explain.'

She had responded instantly, on her best notepaper, though she knew then that a casual scrawl sent ten days later would be the thing to turn the trick. She had said 'Come to-morrow at five.' She couldn't help it.

Of course, she knew, it really wouldn't make any difference. But for her own self-respect she wished she could appear a bit triumphant. It wouldn't take Dick in. For Dick was clever. But it would help her own morale.

Despising herself she went up to her room immediately after luncheon to prepare for that casual call. Rubbed tissue cream into her face, manicured her nails, experimented with a new arrangement of the loose waves of her short dark hair to hide the gray threads at the part. Weighed the ecrué frock against the green. Lay down then on her bedroom sofa to rest, wishing she could banish thought.

It was a losing fight, this trying not to look your

age, when it was the unspeakable one at which she had just arrived. She couldn't bear to say it even to herself. 'Fair, fat and —— ' But of course she wasn't. Dark, slim and — well — yes, forty. But she didn't look it. If it hadn't been for Patty, she could still have passed for — certainly not more than thirty-three. Women of thirty-three, however, didn't have bouncing débutante daughters of nineteen. But not even Patty's denouncing presence at dinner-table and in drawing-room could make her admit to a day over thirty-seven. She'd stop at thirty-seven, she decided manfully, until she was forty-five. Then skip two years and wait at thirty-nine for her fiftieth birthday. After she had gone over that great edge, surely she would have buried pride. Pride in looks, at least. Then she would seek refuge in the consolations of the intellect. At fifty, Narcissa devoutly hoped, she would hold her own by sheer force of native intelligence. Lots of clever young men adored the companionship of dreadful, disillusioned dowagers. She hoped she could grow into a really wicked old lady. An eighteenth-century old lady, whose startling epigrams would scandalize the rising generation.

What could Dick have to tell her? What was there to tell, after the stark fact, never told, but so dreadfully implied, five years before, that he didn't want to marry her? She had hardly seen him since. Just casually at parties. She had never reconsidered. Never tried to persuade. She had kept her dignity,

woman's most priceless possession, more precious, far, than virtue. She had kept that, too, of course, but only by chance. And somehow, with the passing of the years, with the dreadful immorality of forty, one came to value virtue less highly.

If Dick's wife hadn't died just when she did, Narcissa knew she would have thrown her cap over the windmill. She had believed every word that Dick had said to her. She was all set to stage a romantic elopement. Burn her bridges. Cross the Rubicon. Nothing meant anything to her, not even Patty, compared with Dick.

Dick — charming, disarming Dick! So persuasive. So clever. Three years younger than herself, of course, but so obviously intrigued by what she had always hoped was her less obvious devotion. Dick, the victim of circumstance. Dick, married to poor mad Daphne, locked up in her sanitarium with nurses and doctors. Poor Daphne, whom no one had seen for years, whose girlish gayety and charm had become a romantic legend in her little circle.

Every one was dreadfully sorry for Dick. His personal tragedy was never forgotten. At the most frivolous dinner party it stalked pathetically behind his winning presence. With all his buoyancy, with all his irresistible cleverness, Dick always succeeded in conveying the romantic impression of a wasted life. A life of so much emotional creative promise, that was over before it was fairly begun.

It was strange how every one came to blame poor Daphne for Dick's lack of purpose and accomplishment. He had started out so brilliantly in his career as an architect, after his return from the Beaux-Arts. He'd done several good houses for really quite important people and a country club, in the manner of a French farmhouse, that was the talk of the town. For nearly a decade it was every one's ambition to achieve one of his sophisticated little interiors.

'A woman's drawing-room,' Dick had said, early in his career, 'should become her like her gown.' He had gone far on that simple slogan.

But somehow, Dick had not fulfilled the promise of his early years. His little interiors were all perilously the same.

'And who could blame him?' every one asked. 'With the personal problem he had to face. He was simply shot to pieces.' Poor Daphne had ruined his life. And he was so lovely about her.

He had always been lovely about her, even to Narcissa. Even when he explained quite clearly that Narcissa was the real love of his life and that he couldn't work, he couldn't accomplish, without the emotional fulfillment that their life together would bring.

Narcissa had thought it was very wonderful of him. All the more wonderful because she couldn't feel in just that beautiful way about Robert. Robert, whom she had buried two years before she ever really knew Dick, with an emotion curiously compounded of re-

gret and relief. Regret that their marital experience had been so poignant a failure. Relief that poor Robert had gone before Patty was old enough to sense the relation that existed between them. To see, with the clear, unblinking eyes of youth, just what manner of man her father really was.

Poor Robert — high-living, hard-drinking Robert, carried off in a moment by that gust of pneumonia. Poor Robert, who had brought her such ephemeral happiness, such eternal disillusion. Who had scarcely taught her what love might mean before he wearied of domestic felicity. Narcissa, standing by Robert's open grave, had remembered those early lessons a little wistfully. Still, after all she had lived through in their life together, Narcissa really couldn't think of Robert as beautifully as Dick thought of Daphne.

She would never come between Dick and Daphne. That had been her heroic resolution. She accepted, without protest, the hypothesis that divorce was impossible. That poor mad Daphne, just sane enough to understand an overt act of disloyalty, must be spared that ultimate grief.

She could not marry Dick, but she could make him happy. Not openly, of course. Dick didn't ask that. Narcissa thought it so characteristic of him that his first thought was for her reputation. She could take that little cruise that he suggested to the French West Indies. And later — later she would manage somehow. She would slip into the graceful rôle that he of-

fered her of artist's inspiration. She would try not to feel shabby and shoddy and sordid. She would try to forget Patty.

And then, just as she was poised for flight, Daphne died. That death was a dreadful shock to her. By the very act of dying so opportunely, poor Daphne had brought home to her the enormity of her transgression against Dick's wife. It was almost as if Daphne, with some strange clairvoyance of her disordered brain, had sensed the situation, had faded out of the picture at the very moment when her earthly disappearance could do more for Dick, than her living presence had ever done. Such thoughts, Narcissa knew, were morbid. Poor Daphne couldn't have known. But Narcissa would always remember her with a tenderness equal to Dick's own.

He hadn't written to her. He hadn't wired. He hadn't come. But she understood. If she were moved, Dick must be shattered, by the turn events had taken. She appreciated his remorse. She would wait his coming and she would meet him with the sympathy and understanding that would make everything beautiful once more between them. She would do exactly as Dick wanted.

Three weeks after Daphne's death he turned up one afternoon in her little Georgian drawing-room. That drawing-room, that, two years before, she had arranged and remodeled with the help of his infallible taste. Every line of the pale green paneling, every

stick of furniture, every object in the room, indeed, from the square of brocade on the table to the jade tree on the mantelpiece, had come to mean to her only Dick. Alone in it, she was always sustained by the sense of his living presence.

She had come down her little staircase and had found him awaiting her on the hearthrug. The same charming, disarming Dick. A little subdued, a little somber, with a new shadow in his deep-set eyes. A faint deepening of the little crucified expression that had always lingered there, behind his smile. He had taken her in his arms, quite simply.

'How I have longed for you!' was all he said at first.

She had given him her sympathy, her understanding. It was all very beautiful. She had waited for him to make the first move.

And presently he had made it.

'I must get away,' he had said a little brokenly. 'I want a few weeks by myself. I'll sail — somewhere — I haven't quite decided. And then, I thought — perhaps you'd join me. Not in the West Indies. I couldn't, somehow, go on with just that plan. But I've been thinking — possibly the Azores? I might go to Italy and meet you there, a little later. No one could possibly ever know.'

Narcissa had listened to him almost un-understandingly. She had looked long into his crucified eyes. She saw there only the same convincing look of per-

suasive devotion. Had her ears betrayed her? The Azores? Was he actually, now, proposing an illicit honeymoon on a forgotten island? A month of stolen happiness? An escapade? Something that no one could possibly ever know?

She had always been proud of the fact that she had risen instantly from the little love-seat. Had torn her fingers from his eager grasp.

'I think that would hardly be possible,' she had said quite steadily. And still she could read in his eyes no sense of betrayal. Only a look of startled surprise. 'I've changed my plans,' she went on stonily. She felt like a dead woman, but somehow she must conclude this interview.

'You've changed your plans?' The man looked positively wounded.

'I've changed my plans,' she repeated firmly. 'And, as you've kept to yours, I think it only remains for you to go.'

He had gone without a scene. Narcissa had that to comfort her. She had kept her dignity. Though it hadn't at all impaired his own. He had somehow managed to get himself out of that room with disgraceful composure. The inference was that she had, in his hour of need, incredibly failed him.

He went to Italy. Narcissa sometimes wondered, in the depths of her disillusion, if he subsequently enjoyed a month in the Azores. If he found an understudy for that romantic rôle of inspiration that could

have been hers for the taking. Six months later he returned, wearing his widower's weeds with heartbreaking bravery. The strangest fact Narcissa had to face was that his touching gayety, the wistful pathos in his deep-set eyes, still had the power to break her heart.

Why *hadn't* he wanted to marry her? When she wanted, so dreadfully, to marry him? They had had such *fun* together. They would have had fun always. Was it just that she was older? With a great strapping child like Patty? That she hadn't had much money? Daphne had had millions. Dick had them now. It couldn't have been anything as dreadful as the money. There was really no reason. He just — hadn't wanted to. But no woman would ever understand Dick just as she had. No woman, Narcissa insisted in shameless reverie, would ever love him quite as much as she.

Her life, since that barren moment when she had instinctively saved both dignity and virtue, had been spent entirely on things that hadn't counted. On trivial gayety abroad and dismal moments at home, struggling grotesquely with her ludicrous longing to love. To love, if not Dick, some one of the many men who obviously found her charming. Why wouldn't almost any one do? It was the loving that was fun. And the being loved. She had experimented, faintheartedly, from time to time, on quite a little series of attractive and attracted gentlemen, any one of whom,

she felt rationally, might serve as an object of devotion. But yet they hadn't.

Of course she loved Patty. But that was different. And modern daughters were very little comfort. Filial love was so singularly lacking in that essential element, appreciation!

How much of love was just a form of vanity? A pathetic human desire to be sympathetically applauded as one struck enhancing attitudes on one's little stage? Modern daughters never applauded. They disapproved and disagreed and argued about their disapproval and their disagreement. And Patty was so unlike herself. A funny, practical little party. Strange product of a rational generation. Pretty as a picture, of course, but so fearfully matter of fact. There wasn't a shred of romanticism about her.

Stretched on her bedroom sofa, waiting for the hours to pass, Narcissa forgot Dick for a moment, in her maternal solicitude over Patty. She didn't pretend to understand young people. A queer unawakened generation, for all their freedom and the reckless use they made of it. Incredibly reticent, self-possessed, and mature. Yet really unawakened. By things of the spirit, at least. So self-sufficient, so sure they were right. And yet so very wrong, in their persistent undervaluing of the world of sentiment.

Why, Patty was grown-up. She would marry some day soon. One of those bright young men, whom

Narcissa hardly knew. Timmy Livingstone, perhaps. He was always under foot.

But Patty, of course, might marry any one. What did she know of Patty? Nothing. Why, the child was out of the house all day and most of the night, returning at rare intervals to sleep and telephone and change her clothes. Narcissa never knew, really, whom she was seeing. At any moment an irrelevant son-in-law might crash into her life, a bolt from the blue, and make her a grandmother, almost before she knew it. A preposterous, premature grandmother!

A ring of the doorbell woke Narcissa abruptly from reverie. Was it five? The clock on the mantelpiece pointed only to four. Narcissa sprang from the sofa. But that was Patty's step on the stair. That was Patty's light tap on the door.

'Mother? Are you asleep?' That was Patty on the threshold, hat in hand, fresh and rosy from the March wind, looking like a wood nymph in her russet sport suit. 'I want to telephone.'

She stepped to the bedside, dropped her hat on the counterpane, and picked up the receiver.

'To whom are you telephoning, dear?' asked Narcissa. It was by such pointless trivial questions that she endeavored to keep in touch with Patty's life.

'Timmy,' said Patty briefly, with a hint of irritation in her young voice. She gave the number.

'Timmy's such a nice boy,' said Narcissa sympa-

thetically. 'I like him so much. Don't you, dear?'

'He's a good egg,' said Patty absently, receiver at ear.

A good egg! Narcissa smiled at the graphic idiom of a rational generation. A good egg. Well — Timmy was. But at nineteen she wouldn't have chosen just that phrase to describe an ardent lover. However, a rose under any other name proverbially smelled as sweet! And Patty was addressing the telephone.

'Hello — Hello, Tim — Can't you guess? — How many other girls ring you up in office hours? I bet our name is legion! — Well, this is your side kick. — Yes. Pat. — Now, listen, Timmy, I got your message — This is just to say, I'll be there, dearie, I'll be there — Yes — The usual place at the usual time! — But no, Timmy! Come early. The opera's a washout — Yes. The Meistersingers. — I'll leave before the last act.'

'Patty,' Narcissa interrupted, 'you can't do that!'

'Right-o, old dear,' Patty's voice went on undisturbed. 'I'll be there with bells on! Good-bye!' She hung up the receiver.

'Patty,' said Narcissa severely, 'what are you planning? You can't leave Mrs. Mackay's opera party before the last act.'

'Just watch me,' said Patty serenely. 'You don't know what you can do 'til you try!'

'Where are you meeting Timmy?'

'At the box office.'

'Where is he taking you?'

'To the Africana,' said Patty absently, picking up her hat from the bed.

'Is that one of those black-and-tan places?'

'Now, Mother, don't be prehistoric. They have the best band in town.'

'I don't want you to go.'

Patty tranquilly confronted her mother. Tranquilly, but decidedly. A very obstinate wood nymph.

'Mother, you should be in a museum. You're a period piece.'

Narcissa sighed.

'Well, I suppose Timmy will take care of you.'

Patty laughed indulgently.

'I'll take care of Timmy! You know, Mother, how that is — what it does for a man — to love a good woman!' Abruptly she left the room.

Really, thought Narcissa helplessly, she ought to do something about Patty. But not now. Not just this minute. It was half-past four. Dick would come in half an hour. She hoped Patty wouldn't burst in on their tête-à-tête. But she wouldn't, of course. She never bothered with her mother's friends. A man at the tea-table was no intriguing novelty.

Narcissa, having combed, for the last time, her short dark locks and decided irrevocably on the green, descended the staircase, and contemplated the charming little interior from the threshold. It *was* a lovely room. And it was Dick all over. She had never moved

a chair from the original positions in which he had placed them. And the room became her. Dick had seen to that.

Narcissa glanced at her image, reflected from the doorway in the mirror over the fireplace. In that golden light, against those faded Georgian panels, she looked young and really lovely, in her soft green draperies. She stood the test of time. She was not afraid to see Dick again. At least not for that reason.

She struck a match and kindled the fire. Moved the jade tree an inch, to the precise center of the little shelf. Smiled reassuringly at herself in the mirror, before turning to contemplate the room from a new angle. Then moved to the table to rearrange the golden tulips in the great glass bowl. Dick always said she had a gift with flowers.

The doorbell rang. Narcissa felt a sudden surge of panic. Incredible, devastating, to think he had not been in this room since that other March afternoon, five years ago, when she had sent him out of it. She glanced again, a little fearfully, in the mirror. She was all right, of course. Looking her best, really. Still — Narcissa moved hurriedly to turn out the lamp near the chimney piece. The firelight was pleasanter. She heard the front door open and close. Her heart was beating absurdly. She dropped on the love-seat and composed her draperies. A step on the stair. An ardent, hurried step. And Dick stood on the threshold.

'Cissy!' he said. Just 'Cissy!' And his eager face broke into an ingenuous smile. 'How nice to be here again! How sweet of you to let me come!'

Narcissa rose from the love-seat.

'Your note sounded — urgent.'

He took her hand. She hadn't meant to offer it. Somehow, when she saw him standing there, so easily, so gracefully, on her hearthrug, the sense of insult rose again in her breast.

'It *was* urgent. But don't let's talk of that just this first minute. I want to look about me. I want to look at you. Everything is exactly the same.'

Charming, disarming Dick! Narcissa rallied her forces.

'You saw *me* last week at the Livingstone ball. Wasn't it Friday?' She dropped back on the little love-seat. 'Did you expect to find me irrevocably altered since then?'

'Cissy!' he protested lightly. 'Don't be captious! Be nice to me, now I'm here! I meant the room, of course. It's really lovely. One of the best I ever did. And you haven't moved a paper-weight! How awfully wise of you?' He sank down in an armchair. 'So many women change their drawing-rooms as often as they change their hats. It's so confusing of them! I'm glad they do, of course. I don't know what would become of architects in a world of women like you!'

He seemed perfectly at home. He betrayed no

trace of embarrassment. Narcissa found herself perversely wishing that she had made the place completely over. That he had found the little scene quite swept and garnished of all old associations when he made his belated reëntrance.

The maid brought in the tea.

'Scones!' cried Dick rapturously, as he surveyed the tray. 'Cissy, why are you the only woman in the world who can achieve real Scotch scones for tea?'

'I didn't remember that you cared for them particularly,' lied Narcissa bravely.

'Of course you didn't! But you are a woman, Cissy, whose every casual gesture is distinguished by unerring felicity! I adore them, and I haven't had them since last I had them here.'

'How do you take your tea?' asked Cissy with bravado.

Dick gave the requested information without a twinkle. But he wasn't deceived for a moment. It was dreadful, really dreadful, the Darby and Joan atmosphere that this little occasion was acquiring. Narcissa felt like a discarded mistress. She wasn't, thank Heaven, quite that!

Dick settled back in his armchair with a sigh of pleasure over his fragrant cup of orange pekoe. Delightful, debonair Dick. He didn't look a day older. The touch of gray about his ears lent only distinction to his boyish grace. His eyes were fastened on her

face with a smile of quizzical admiration. Really, how charming he was, thought Narcissa, her eyes averted, her hands busy with the tea-things. She would never get over him. Might she have, she wondered, if she *had* been his mistress? If Daphne had died a week later? If rapture had preceded disillusion? If she had loved before she had lost? If she had had the opportunity to learn from bitter experience that nothing is ever quite as good as you thought it was going to be?

Dick broke the little pause.

'You don't know, Cissy, how I've missed you all these years.' That was rank effrontery, but when her eyes met his she felt them softening.

'Have you?' she murmured. And, in spite of herself her voice sounded perilously tender.

'Don't you know?' he asked. 'No one ever understood me as you did.'

She tore her eyes from his. This direct attack was very confusing. What did he want of her?

'I'm glad you thought so,' she said briefly. 'I felt, myself, I understood you very well.'

'You would always understand everything. And you would always forgive.'

Narcissa managed a little mocking laugh.

'"'Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner,"' she quoted gayly. 'Aren't you growing a little sentimental, Dick, in your old age?'

She thought he winced a trifle at her last words.

'Do you feel old?' he asked. 'I don't myself. And yet I'm thirty-seven.'

'Certainly I don't!' protested Narcissa with indignation. 'I don't feel a day over twenty-five! And every year,' she went on courageously, 'I have more fun. There's been an awful lot of nonsense talked about the pangs of growing older.'

'That's like you, Cissy,' he said admiringly. 'You'll always be wonderful.'

'I hope,' said Narcissa severely, 'that I'll always be adequate. I feel more — competent than I used to. That's the only way I notice the touch of time. I'm quite equal, now,' she went on steadily, 'to any situation that might ever arise.'

'I'm glad you feel that way,' said Dick simply.

There was a little pause. Dick replaced his cup upon the tea-tray. He rose to stand before the flickering fire. The flutter of the flame was, for a moment, the only movement in the silent room.

'Cissy,' said Dick, 'I've come to ask you something.'

There was a faint tremor in his voice. Narcissa looked up at him quickly. He looked really ill at ease, now. And very much moved. Narcissa's heart was beating fast.

'What is it, Dick?' she asked. And her voice was breathless.

He made a restless movement.

'Cissy,' he said, 'I — I haven't got the nerve to tell you.'

Her heart went out to him. He was really in difficulty.

'Dick, you mustn't feel that way, ever, about me.'

He gave her a grateful glance.

'I know, Cissy. But this — this is difficult.'

Narcissa's eyes dropped before his own. He was obviously deeply in earnest. The old persuasive note had crept back into his voice. Why — it could only mean one thing. Narcissa sat motionless, her eyes fixed on her hands, clasped tightly on her lap. Hearing that undertone of emotion in his broken voice, Narcissa knew that Dick had come back to her. He had come back to take her on her own terms. He had recognized his mistake. It was up to her, now, to open or close the door on happiness. Dick had come awooing. She could not be mistaken. She knew Dick too well.

'What is it, Dick?' she asked softly. And with the words the door to happiness swung invitingly ajar.

'It's hard to tell you. Though I know you'll understand.' He turned, suddenly, to face the fire. He gazed a moment, silently, at the flaming logs. 'You see, Cissy, I — I want to marry your daughter.'

Narcissa sat quite motionless on the little love-seat, her eyes upon her tea-tray. This — this was beyond everything. This was the end of the world. There was an awful silence. Narcissa would have given her soul to break it. But no words came to her. She sat as in a trance. The little, wavering, half-invisible

flame beneath her kettle obtruded itself on her dazed attention. She moved to turn it out. The kettle was empty, she thought stupidly. Her hands were shaking so that she couldn't even grasp the little handle. She gave it up, after a futile moment. She clasped her hands again, tightly, so they wouldn't tremble. Her knuckles were white. Her rings cut into her fingers.

'You want to marry — Patty?' she said at last. How long had the silence lasted? Narcissa never knew.

He turned, now, to look at her.

'I want to marry Patty,' he said firmly.

'I — I don't believe you,' said Narcissa. 'I can't believe you. Patty is a child.'

'Patty is nineteen,' said Dick very reasonably. His face lit up as he added quickly, 'And Patty is adorable.'

The words stung Narcissa instantly into action.

'You can't marry Patty!' she said hotly. 'I — I won't permit it.'

'Can you help it?' asked Dick with a sudden flash of anger. Then quickly, penitently, 'Forgive me, Cissy. I didn't mean quite that.'

What a cad he was! thought Narcissa passionately. What an utter cad! To come back like this, to the very same room, to say he wanted — Patty. Why — the echoes of their former fatal interview still trembled for Narcissa in the circumambient air. Then it

was — the Azores. Now it was her daughter. And his note of pleading was precisely the same. But this time, it had ended in an ultimatum. He had threatened her. Taunted her with her helplessness. But she wasn't helpless. She was Patty's mother. She could —— But what *could* she do, thought Narcissa desperately, with a surging memory of the obstinate wood nymph she had faced not an hour ago, in her room upstairs? Patty wouldn't give up even a night club for her mother. What chance was there of persuading her to abandon a desperate lover? A lover like — Dick? There was no hope in Patty.

And Dick? Dick would override all protest. Dick would ignore appeal. Hadn't she seen him, five years before on that very hearthrug, break through the cobweb ties of honor, without a scruple, without a shame?

But she would die fighting.

'Of course I can prevent it,' she said superbly and deftly extinguished the alcohol lamp as she spoke. She had herself in hand now. 'Patty is my child.'

'Isn't your first concern her happiness?'

'Would she find happiness with you?' Scorn pointed her words.

'I think she would,' said Dick promptly. 'We have everything in common.'

Everything in common! Patty and Dick! How perfectly preposterous! Why, the child was an ignoramus, without taste, without knowledge. She had

no conception of Dick's interests. Besides, how did he know? When had he seen her?

'Have you been much with her?' she asked guardedly.

'Why, I've been seeing her all winter. We've been constantly together.'

Of course that was possible. She knew so little of Patty's companionship. Dick was at all the parties. But it seemed incredible that the child should have known him so well and never mentioned him. But Patty mentioned no one, except in answer to direct questions. She never discussed her affairs.

'Have you spoken to her?' Her heart hung on his answer. It came quickly, reproachfully.

'Cissy, do you think I would? Before I spoke to you?'

'I would put nothing beyond you,' she said coldly.

'You're unfair to me, Cissy. You're awfully unfair. There's no reason in the world why I shouldn't marry your daughter —— '

'Please ——' said Narcissa gravely.

'Can you name a reason?' He looked at her keenly. 'Is there a reason you *could* name?'

Narcissa's eyes flashed fire.

'I know what manner of man you are,' said Narcissa firmly. 'That's reason enough.'

'For you, perhaps. But not for me — and Patty. Cissy — listen to me. I love your daughter. I could make her happy. Can't you see, don't you under-

stand, that the situation concerns no one but me and the woman I love?'

'Why, then, did you come to me?'

'I came because I wanted to be on the square with you, Cissy. I wanted to tell you what I was doing before it was done.'

'How *very* honorable of you,' said Narcissa.

Dick winced at her words. Then his tone suddenly altered.

'Cissy, don't treat me so unkindly. Don't you know, you who know everything, what I've been through over it all? I'm in hell, Cissy. Absolutely in hell. I have been for months. I can't work any more — I can't think. There's no one but you to help me. I — I counted absolutely on your understanding.'

His voice tore at her heartstrings. What a fool she was! She would never get over him. He was watching her intently.

'It was foolish of me to speak as I did, Cissy,' he said gently. 'You have my life in your hands, of course. I throw myself on your mercy.'

'I can't — be merciful,' said Narcissa piteously. 'You — you shouldn't ask it.'

'I *do* ask it,' he returned gravely. His eyes met hers. They were pitiful, beseeching.

Before she could reply, the door to the hall was flung open abruptly and Patty entered the room. Dick wheeled to stare at her.

'I'm hungry,' said Patty pleasantly. 'Can I have a cup of tea? Why, it's Richard! Hello, Dicky-bird!'

Dicky-bird! Narcissa gasped at the word. Dick's lips curved in a triumphant smile. The child advanced tranquilly toward the fire.

'I'm afraid the scones are cold,' said Narcissa steadily.

'I like chocolate cake better,' said Patty amiably, picking up a piece without a plate and munching it cheerfully, as she perched on the arm of the love-seat.

Narcissa gave her her tea, looking dumbly up at her, trying to understand, trying to see the child with new eyes. It was no use. She couldn't. This was just — Patty. Her little girl. Strayed from the nursery into the drawing-room. She was not even a very tidy little girl, at the moment. She had not troubled to brush her hair. It was still ruffled from the mad March wind. Why, the child looked messy, positively messy, in that crumpled sport suit, with traces of chocolate on her finger-tips and cake crumbs in her lap! Narcissa strove to be casual.

'You don't look very tidy, my dear,' she said.

'I should worry,' smiled Patty. 'There's only Dick. He won't mind.'

'On the contrary,' said Dick very earnestly, 'I think you look charming. "A sweet disorder in the dress,"' he quoted lightly, '"Kindles in clothes a wantonness."'

Patty twinkled up at him. But,

'Isn't he literary?' was all she said, as she applied herself to her tea.

Narcissa rose abruptly. This was more than she could bear. Dick did not mean to go. She saw that clearly. And Patty obviously had designs on a second piece of cake. But she — she really couldn't see them together like this a moment longer. She'd have to get used to the idea, alone. There was nothing she could do about it. The situation had slipped from her control. Had never really been there. She had known that the moment that Patty had entered the room. The moment that she had heard that fatal 'Dicky-bird.' She would retreat. Retreat, once more, with dignity. She would leave her daughter the field.

'I have some notes to write, Dick,' she said evenly, 'and I'm dining early. If you'll excuse me I'll — leave you to Patty.'

Again, a little unexpectedly, she found her hand in his.

'I'll take good care of her,' he said, with grateful humility.

'Patty takes very good care of herself,' Narcissa answered proudly.

She wished she could believe her own words. Without another glance for the child on the love-seat, she walked with composure to the door.

Alone in her bedroom, Narcissa sat quietly down on her sofa to face the future. She still felt, absurdly,

that it couldn't be going to happen. That life wasn't going to ask this of her. To see Patty — Patty — in Dick's arms. Patty, in tranquil possession of the riches that she had never possessed. Patty, holding in her childish hands the priceless treasure of Dick's love. Herself, the grandmother of Dick's children. It *must* be a nightmare. It *couldn't* be true. Life couldn't be so cruel. She had known disillusion. She had known despair. But this was complete devastation.

In the drawing-room, downstairs, Patty might now be in Dick's arms, listening to the vows of eternal devotion that fell — oh, Narcissa knew how glibly! — from his eager lips. She had been a coward. An arrant coward. She had thought only of herself. And of Dick. Not at all, really, of Patty. Jealousy, green-eyed jealousy, nothing more admirable, had barbed her tongue. She should have protected Patty. Saved her from those false protestations. But would they be false — when addressed to her daughter? How could she tell? How could she know? Dick had deceived her. But would he deceive Patty? Hadn't she been, after all, the victim of self-deception? She had been a fool. She had played her cards badly. She hadn't been clever enough to manage. One had only one's self to blame for failure. It wasn't fair, it really wasn't fair, to hold it all up against Dick.

A step on the stair arrested her attention. Why, it couldn't be Patty! It wasn't twenty minutes since

she had left them together. Had Dick unexpectedly succumbed to belated scruple? Touched by her abdication, made a generous gesture? Put off, at least until to-morrow, what might so easily have been done to-day?

'Patty?' she called tremulously. And again, 'Patty!'

The child stood in the doorway, cool, unconcerned, perhaps a trifle annoyed.

'What is it, Mother?'

'Has Dick gone?'

'Yes.'

There was a moment's pause.

'Why did he go so soon?'

'He wanted to,' said Patty briefly, a hint of defiance in her voice.

'Patty — what did you say to him?'

The child made a pettish little gesture of irritation.

'Oh, really, Mother —— Do you know what he came to say to me?'

'Yes, Patty.'

'Well, you needn't trouble to argue about it, Mother,' said Patty combatively. 'It won't do a bit of good. I've made up my mind.'

'You've — made up your mind?' Narcissa could hardly pronounce the words.

'Yes. And I know everything you're going to say before you say it. I know you think he's charming. I know he has millions. I've had an earful on his

tragic life. But I just don't think he's attractive. That settles it for me.'

Narcissa rose unsteadily from her sofa.

'You — don't — think — he's — attractive?' Her stiff lips with difficulty framed the words.

'Mother! Have a heart! I know he's the dowager's delight, but I just don't like him. He thinks he's *such* a sheik!

'Patty!' cried Narcissa in horrified protest. Really at such blasphemy her hands flew to her ears.

'He does, Mother. He's been hanging around young people's parties all winter. But he's eighteen years older than I am — just an old man — for all his winning ways.'

A wave of pity flooded Narcissa's heart. Patty never looked lovelier than she did at that moment, standing flushed and defiant on the threshold. Narcissa moved quickly to take the child in her arms. She kissed the cool pink cheek. Then suddenly Narcissa began to cry.

'Mother!' cried Patty incredulously. 'What's the matter?'

'I'm so sorry for him, Patty,' she heard herself incredibly saying. 'So dreadfully sorry.'

'He's sorry for himself,' remarked Patty coolly. 'He thought he was irresistible. Well — he's learned that I can resist him.'

Narcissa turned, sobbing, and sank upon her sofa.

'Youth's — terribly — cruel,' said Narcissa, weakly.

Patty advanced to the sofa side and regarded her mother with mute amazement. Narcissa's tears broke into hysterical laughter.

'But you don't have to marry him, darling — to please me!'

THE DINNER PARTY

'E-Q-U-A-T-O-R,' replied Martha abstractedly, as she tucked her hairnet under her French twist. 'No *w*, dear.' Bill's little freckled face was watching her anxiously. 'I'll certainly be glad when your school is over!'

She poked in two invisible hairpins and looked critically at her reflection in the mirror. She was glad that she had once more withstood temptation. Something about the thirty-six-year-old chin line forbade, or *should* forbid, the boyish bob.

'I should look,' she thought, secretly rejoicing, as always, in the felicitous phrase, 'like one of the better-fed Medici. Or Muratore singing Romeo.'

Funny, though, no matter what the style, stylish was just what she couldn't look. For her that fine brittle finish of fashion was beyond achievement. Wasn't she nearer it, though, at thirty-six, than she had been at twenty, or at fifteen? At fifteen she had been *dreadful*, a shy little gawk who had hated dancing-school, except for Hugh, after Hugh had discovered her. And at twenty — why, she had only to turn her head to see her cap and gown picture, sentimentally enshrined on Tom's bureau, to envisage *that* horror. What fine flower of modern civilization, she thought, *could* be less attractive than a Bryn

Mawr Junior in the early days of the century? Now, she wasn't gray yet, and she did have sort of a — well — yes — *clever* look — amused and amusing. Rather as if life had been fun but not too funny.

'Pussy,' said Martha, 'put *down* that lipstick. Look out for the cologne, Bill! Don't you *see* — it takes off the varnish?'

'Mummy,' began Thomas, her eldest, waving a pad over her bare shoulder. She cut him off defensively.

'Junior, you'll have to ask your father. I don't understand square root, myself. Pussy! Get out of my light! Bill! That will do. Now, go out, all of you, and take the puppy. Pick up those marbles. *Where* is Mademoiselle? Pussy, I know it's your bedtime!'

The children tumbled good-humoredly toward the door. There was Tom twinkling at them on the threshold. Tom, with his summer tweed overcoat flung open over his Tuxedo, beaming paternally at his offspring and glancing, but without comment, at the clock on the mantelpiece.

'The car's in front,' he said briefly.

If she ever left him, thought Martha, clasping her pearls, it would be just because he glanced at the clock once too often. The habits of husbands! What every woman knows! Like Karenin cracking his finger joints — what else, really, had started the chain of events that had eventually cast Anna Karenina under the railroad train! That passion for punctuality as an end in itself. That inexplicable inner urge never

to be last at a dinner party, always to be first at a railroad station, to see the fireproof curtain rise at the play!

And to-night it was just silly. Sylvia was always the last to arrive at her own parties. You couldn't do her a better turn than to show up twenty minutes late. Silly, seductive Sylvia, slipping in just after her own cocktails, with her gay excuse, her low, languorous laugh, and that little air of the leading lady entering after the stage was set and the entrance pointed by the subsidiary characters of the drama! Silly Sylvia, sweet Sylvia — the fine finish of fashion was *her* birthright. Sylvia at fifteen, in a cloud of golden curls and a blue hair-ribbon, a passionate collector of crêpe-paper cotillion favors. Sylvia at twenty, incredible vision, ethereally compounded of blonde pompadour and stiff white satin and floating tulle, following a Floradora sextet to Saint James's altar! Sylvia at thirty-seven, artlessly artificial, softly sophisticated — what was it she had said yesterday at luncheon apropos of the new dressing-room that Willy Hinchman had just designed for her little town house? 'I can't dress for dinner with a man in the room!'

'I always dress for dinner,' Martha had replied, 'with *three* men in the room — two of them doing home-work!' And that didn't count Pussy. Pussy was the worst of all, now that she was walking. Not that Martha could look at Pussy, ever, without that soft flood of maternal affection sweeping over her.

Pussy, who had, incredibly, after two sons, been a daughter. That moment of Pussy's birth would, somehow, always be with her, just around the corner, the next thought to pop out — that moment when *every*thing in the world was all right, when braced for that familiar phrase, 'It's a beautiful little boy, Mrs. Cavendish,' she had heard Tom's voice, ecstatic, incredulous, rejoicing:

'It's a daughter, Martha! You lose! It's a daughter!'

She had bet him ten minutes before on the outcome.

Tom was laughing at her now. Why? Oh, the long paste ear-rings. Did the man live who liked his own wife in ear-rings? Other men's wives, that was different. Ear-rings and lipsticks — Cæsar's wife shouldn't have them. She laughed, too, and rose.

'I'm ready. Where's my evening coat? Is the rain over?'

'You look sweet to-night.' Tom *was* a darling. 'In that dress. Is it new?' Tom *was* a fool. It was three years old. Was it the subtlest form of flattery or merely insulting that he never noticed her clothes? But what would she do with a man who did? For she hated to notice them herself. She asked for nothing better than one good-looking black evening gown into which she could slip every night without thought, like a man into his dinner coat. Yet she liked to look nice. Well, she did this evening. But she ought to shorten that skirt — an inch would make all the difference.

'Are you ready, dear?' she inquired with innocence. 'I'm waiting.'

It was a beautiful evening, green and gold after the rain, with the sun still high in the west. The drenched bridal wreath was sparkling on her suburban terrace. They would have a lovely run around the lake. No dust. And the country would be June pretty. She loved daylight saving.

What was it that seemed so peculiarly festive, even decadent, about bright yellow sunlight on evening clothes? Oh, of course, early memories of London, midsummer London, driving out, tourist-wise, with her father to the play after dinner. White shirt fronts of Englishmen in hansom cabs, that was it! And the bare necks of Englishwomen beside them. At a time when the bare necks of Americans weren't the every-night affair in the corn belt that they had since become. Gracious, she *was* growing old! Appalling to be able to remember a hansom cab just like that, as if seen only yesterday! Why, the children had known them only to laugh at in the bound volumes of their grandfather's 'Punch,' as she herself had known stage-coaches!

Memories were tricky things, anyway. The farthest ones seemed so the nearest. This road, now, around the lake that she was bowling along with Tom in the family Buick, incredible strip of white cement frosting laid over the familiar contours of the landscape, appallingly changed from the leafy bypath of

her childhood, could she ever traverse it without thinking of Hugh? Of Hugh and his high-wheeled runabout and Booker T. Washington, his father's old black horse? What had he said to her once as Booker slowed down for the very hill that would presently send Tom into second?

'I love roads. They're like life. They can take you anywhere. 'Specially uphill ones you can't see over.'

They were seventeen then. That was their last summer at the lake together. Nineteen years ago, and she'd never gone up that hill without remembering that tender little adolescent remark.

The road had grown up with her. She knew intimately its every scarlet gasoline station and rickety hot-dog stand, but there were sudden turns through sunflecked Wisconsin woodland and certain glimpses of Wisconsin farmland, rolling against the summer sky, that brought back those three lost summers so poignantly that nothing in between seemed really to have ever counted. The skyline, most of all, recalled the old emotion. Was it that it remained most unchanged, impervious to the roadside devastation of hot dogs and gas stations, the same old contours against the blue, the eternal hills? Or was it rather that she had always looked at it, straight over the pricked black ears of Booker, at some round knoll crowned with an orchard or scrub-oak grove, some tranquil upland meadow, with its frieze of black-and-white Wisconsin cattle against the sky? Looked stead-

fastly across the patchwork of the summer crops, while Hugh was talking to her, joyously, confusedly avoiding the happy, unspoken ardor of his young eyes.

Why was first love considered such a joke by the adult world? Puppy love, calf love — disgusting names. Even the gentle hand of Booth Tarkington rubbed off all the bloom. He saw it a little tenderly, but objectively, after all. A picturesque affair of baby-talk girls and beardless boys. He didn't feel it from the inside, that glamorous dawning of emotion, that incredulous ecstasy of companionship, heightened by the first tremulous touch of passion.

Who had ever done first love, anyway, as she had felt it? Seriously, solemnly. There was, of course, William Shakespeare — Romeo and Juliet; but after all a thirty-six-year-old sense of humor forced you to admit that you and your young man at seventeen had presented more the appearance of something by Booth Tarkington than those ill-starred lovers!

'Made it in high!' declared Tom triumphantly. 'Some little bus! I never go up this hill, Mart, without thinking of how we used to coast down it, those winter house parties when we were getting engaged. Remember that bob sled? "Robert," you called it. Wonder where it is now. We ought to get one next year for the boys.'

'Oh, Tommy, no! I couldn't bear it! Not with all the motors. The hazards of the road aren't what they were in our young days!'

The hazards of the road! Hadn't she met them herself, on this very hillside, and dealt with them — who could say with how much wisdom or folly? But, of course, when you were young you didn't 'deal with' hazards, really. You just crashed into them, too horribly casually, and you got by them somehow, without too much thinking.

What was youth, anyway, but just driving slowly up a hilly lane with one young man or coasting riotously down it with another? At the crossroads you ran unexpectedly, devastatingly, into the motor truck of marriage. Or you didn't. It was only later that that feeling for the irrevocable moment crept into your consciousness and made you wonder just what would have happened if you'd whipped up Booker over his écru fly net, or ditched the bob sled, just before the crash.

'Well, *we* ran into a milk wagon, once, and lived to be glad we'd done it,' volunteered Tom cheerfully.

That milk wagon, that scene on the snowy roadside! Tom's prostrate figure in his old tan leather coat, and herself and Sylvia, the child chaperon they had called Sylvia that winter, and Nan and Jimmy, bending over him and staring in horror at that spreading scarlet stain in the snow. Tom's eyelids flickering over his blue, blue eyes, and his funny far-away voice saying feebly, but so thrillingly, 'Where's Martha?'

It *was* thrilling, at twenty-one, her name faltering

on his lips with returning consciousness. Sylvia had thought so, too, and that night, the young house party calmed and quieted and Tom beautifully bandaged by the village doctor, she had said so with freedom, leaving the conjugal chamber for the purpose, coming in wrapped in quilts, to perch at the foot of the twin brass beds in the room that Martha and Nan were sharing. Even Nan had been impressed. Disillusioned Nan, just recovering from a third broken engagement, in a mood none too receptive toward romance.

Funny to think that if Tom hadn't hit that milk wagon she mightn't have married him. How ridiculous! Whom could she ever have married but Tom? On what other hypothesis were the last fourteen years even conceivable? Absurd not to think of that fatalistic milk wagon when she came to the hill instead of that casual little comment of Hugh's on roads and life.

Why, she hadn't even heard from Hugh for over five years. Not since his divorce. Did she answer his last letter? She couldn't even remember. And she hadn't seen him since — why, it must be eleven years now, that awful August day, on a Boston street, the summer before Billy was born. She *did* look such a fright. So hot and tired. She remembered still that sick feeling of realization that that dapper young man in cool flannels in front of her *was* Hugh and that he was going to see her and stop and speak and know that she could look so unattractive.

He had stopped and spoken, of course, and his brown eyes were just the same, and his funny crooked little smile, and his voice — oh, above all, his voice! He seemed awfully glad to see her. Hadn't looked a bit as if he thought she looked horrid. But that was just Hugh's niceness. He would never let her know if he thought she'd gone off awfully. Still, it had been lovely to see him, and laugh with him, just for that minute. Though she had cried about it later, locked securely in her hotel room at Cotuit. Cried, she hardly knew why — partly because she simply could not bear to appear as a figure of forlornity in Hugh's eyes, but even more because just seeing him seemed to present a problem that could only be met by nervous tears. Intolerable that Hugh should be in the world at all and not her Hugh. Impossible that he and she could ever meet on any other than that old familiar basis of unavowed but utterly fundamental affection. Somehow after that chance meeting on Boylston Street, she never really wanted to see Hugh again.

He was down there from New York, arranging for his first one-man exhibition, he had told her. Hugh's distinction as a portrait painter had come early. She hadn't seen his show. It didn't open until November. And two years later he had married.

Never, never would she forget the anguish of that moment when she first heard of his engagement. Even now, at the mere memory of it all, she felt her hands give a little instinctive flutter of negation as if

they could put away a thought too dreadful to be born. She was pushing the baby carriage home from the A. and P. store on North State Street. Nan had told her. It would be Nan, of course. Not that Nan, never having lived at the lake as a girl, had ever known Hugh as she and Sylvia had. But she'd met him later, in New York and Santa Barbara and Miami, and once even in Venice. Nan always met people in places like that. She always knew everything about everybody and usually told it. Nan had even met, on the tennis courts of Biarritz, the girl that Hugh was going to marry. A New-Yorker, she had said, four or five years younger than they were. Hugh had painted her mother's portrait that summer, out at their place on Long Island. That was how he'd known her.

Martha could remember just how she had turned dumbly down Elm Street, past the gold-and-russet chrysanthemum display of Wienhoeber's window, past the dreary little row of stone 'Palmer houses,' built in Chicago's least felicitous period, her eyes on the clean blue streak at the end of the street that was the lake. When she turned on to the Drive, the last brown leaves of the elm trees were whirling down in the November gale. A lovely day, somehow Western in feeling, with a high wind and a bright sun and that great wash of lake, as blue and as empty as the sky.

Was she going to *cry*, on the street, over Hugh's engagement, pushing her second baby in the go-cart before her? Must she be as grotesque as that at such

a tragic moment? Was that what the middle years were going to teach her? That to take life tragically was, after all, only to be funny? It was the consideration of that abstract problem that had saved the tears. That and the fact that Billy had blessedly taken that moment to throw the can of peas out of the go-cart, so that she had to stoop and pick it up from the pavement, and spank his hands and tuck him in again and meet life practically on the terms on which she had accepted it.

And all the anguish there was she somehow got over in just that one moment of realization. Later she dispatched, with never a tremor, a conventional dozen plates to New York as a wedding present. It was only on the twenty-third day of December — she always remembered the date because she was standing on the steps of the corner grocery picking out the family Christmas tree when the thought occurred to her — that she remembered quite casually that Hugh's wedding day had been the nineteenth.

'Who'll be at this party,' inquired Tom abruptly, 'besides Willy Hinchman?'

Martha's grin was scarcely wifely. Tom's enthusiasm for artistic young men at intimate functions had always been attended by reserves. The passion for interior decorating that had swept over Sylvia in the middle thirties had its drawbacks. And Willy Hinchman, Martha knew Tom felt, was one of them. Sylvia's town house, with its lovely little eighteenth-

century interior, was, for him, only the silver lining to the cloud of having to put up with Willy at every dinner party. Men didn't like Willy much, but Martha did. Liked his gay garrulous tongue and the precious, rather penetrating, little intellect that lay behind it.

Out here at the lake, in the big Victorian barn of a house that Sylvia had inherited from her father, his presence did seem a little incongruous. It was making itself felt, though, insidiously, and Martha always thought that it was a tribute to his force of character that it was. The Victorian era had arrived at its second blooming, and Willy was discovering new raptures in hitherto neglected black walnut suites and still-life canvases of dead ducks and deader salmon. Martha felt that the old familiar interiors would soon be swept and garnished into a period picture. She could even foresee the day when Willy would drape, once more, the bead and bamboo curtain that she and Sylvia used to braid in their childhood, in the dining-room doorway, and rehang the Æolian harp in the draft over the side entrance!

'You're rough on Willy, Tommy,' she said genially. 'He's an acquired taste, I admit. Something like long ear-rings. Nothing to have hanging about a wife! Willy's a later Roman — a bit overripe! He goes with the fall of the empire.'

'What his lure is for the ladies,' said Tom, 'I can't see. Why, three years ago Sylvia didn't know a chair from a table! And now look at her!'

'I do look at her, Tommy, and with pleasure. I'm all on your side! The view is, as Baedeker would say, "rewarding!" But I understand his lure. It's mental.'

'Mental!' Tom's accent was scorn in its essence. 'Jim's bean's worth two of his.'

'And don't you forget, Tommy, that Sylvia knows it. But the best of us girls could do with a change, now and then. There's quite,' said Martha meditatively, as they turned under the woodbine of the old rustic archway and rolled down the maple avenue in fresh June leaf — 'there's quite a quiet little kick to Willy!'

There he was now, airily waving one of Jim's famous gin sours and holding forth to Constance Tuckerman on the front piazza, a burst of laughter rising in response to his latest sally. Clif was there without Nan. They were a queer couple. Constance must have brought him. And Jim was hovering hospitably, shaker in hand, in the background. Gay they looked, the men and the cocktails, and Constance in that pink chiffon, under the old purple clematis vine. Fun to be dining out, Martha thought, with that quick lift of the spirit that always attended her arrival at any friendly festive function. Fun to laugh and be laughed at, to love and be loved. She *did* love them. Nice people. Funny people. Amusing.

'Hi, Martha!' called Jim, as the Buick rolled to a standstill and she stepped out on the old-fashioned

carriage block. 'Park her anywhere, Tommy. Just one more coming. Nan in the Chrysler. Just in time, Martha, to finish the first round. Here you are, dearie! Over the hot sands!'

She took the little Venetian glass appreciatively.

'This must be a pretty picture! Me tumbling out of my Buick into my gin! What *do* you proverbially drink on a carriage block, Willy? Something frightfully period! Oh, I know — a stirrup cup! But that's always when you're going, and never, I'm sure, when you're female!'

'There's a woman,' said Willy with emphasis, 'with a soul that shrinks like mine from an anachronism! Martha, dear, in a Philistine world like this you're a great comfort to me. I've just been telling Jim that Sylvia ought to give a Victorian ball out here this summer. That one they had at Windsor for Napoleon III. I'd like the chance of doing Sylvia as Eugénie!'

'He talks *just* as if she were something he could upholster, doesn't he, Jimmy? But I'd like to do Tommy as a British statesman, myself. Melbourne, maybe. Was he still alive then, Willy? Tommy'd be sweet in sideburns. Regular mutton chops. Or Piccadilly weepers. He's got that mellow eighteen-fifty look. But I don't just see this place as Windsor. Not even with you, Willy, waving the wand! You forget I played jacks on this piazza. How unlike the homelife of our dear Queen!'

'Why, Martha,' put in Constance Tuckerman ea-

gerly, 'I think it's a marvelous idea. I was just telling Willy that perhaps we could do it for my Czechish Relief.'

'Do we have to have this?' thought Martha lightly. She was not internationally minded — and proud of it, she was wont unregenerately to add.

These earnest women with causes — funny, to her there was something so frivolous about them fundamentally. They took their Czechs and their Relief with such childlike solemnity, and yet wasn't the stir somehow all on the surface? Or was it just her own limitation that she couldn't conceive of a cause about which *she* could really be earnest, as she conceived earnestness? Personal, fatally personal, that was her difficulty. These others, getting up benefits, attending committees, holding meetings! Doing the serious work of the world, of course. But what work *was* there to do that *was* serious, except just thinking. Thinking about the people you knew, and yourself, pigeonholing impressions, jumping to conclusions — what was it Tommy always said about her, 'More and better conclusions were her aim in life' — getting to understand a little. That was the fun of being thirty-six.

That — and knowing how lovely the world could look. The green slope of the lawn this minute, almost yellow in the evening light. Eight o'clock, and the sun only just setting behind the wooded hillside back of the garden. Sunlight still touching the top of that

huge silver birch tree, quivering sensitively in the breezeless air. *That* was what it was fun to try to be at thirty-six! It had just come to her. A silver birch tree that could shake and shiver in invisible cross-currents, when the stolid green maples didn't even know the wind was up!

'Where's Nan, Clif?' she asked abruptly.

'Nan's running over from Lake Forest. Bringing some man with her. Going back to-night. I've been here with Constance for the week-end.'

Clif sounded important.

'I had the Dalmatian Commission for lunch to-day,' explained Constance. 'That nice Mr. Snouritch. Have you met him, Martha? He wanted to know Clif. We almost got him signed up for Geneva, in August.'

Well, Clif was absolutely as safe with Constance Tuckerman, thought Martha, as he would be with the League of Nations! And, of course, Nan didn't give a rap. Nan had always her own fish to fry. Funny, that marriage. Curious, what so often happened to belles. Nan had been the toast of the town for years. Every one in love with her. Here and there and everywhere. Broken engagements. That young Pole who was killed in the war. Sylvia had been sure that was a go. And then, in the end, Clif. Of course he'd been after her for years. And always so good-looking. And suitable, though so much older. Over forty, when they married and Nan barely turned twenty-eight.

Of course, Nan would never have taken him if she hadn't just jilted that English polo player she'd met in San Francisco on her way 'round the world. Three days out and she'd cabled Clif to meet her in Peking and marry her. Sylvia and Martha always knew just how she came to do it. An irresistible impulse impelling her, in a moment of disillusion, toward the irrevocable. She had had a big wedding at the Legation and they both had so hated not to be there.

Here was Tommy, coming up for his cocktail, looking meditatively down at Constance with that latent twinkle that betrayed to a discerning world that he, too, was not internationally minded.

'The Commission is sailing home next week,' Constance was saying eagerly. 'But Mr. Snouritch is staying on. He's going to have a Round Table at Williamstown, this summer. Clif, you ought to be able to make Williamstown, if you don't get to Geneva.'

Willy, of course, wasn't even listening. But was Clif dimly conscious that she and Jim and Tommy thought it was funny? Clif never cared about things being too funny.

Never, never would she forget the misguided humorous impulse that had led her and Sylvia and Tommy and Jim to go down to that draughty old barn of a Northwestern station to see Clif off for his wedding on the Golden Gate Limited. Rice they had brought, actually rice, and a white satin slipper. And

made awful kid jokes about the Honeymoon Special. And Clif had just stood there, ridiculously dignified, with all his new luggage, feeling conspicuous and hating it and them. How flat they had felt when the Limited pulled out in the murk of the train shed and left them staring foolishly at each other on the platform!

'Behold the bridegroom goeth!' Jim had said, and made them all laugh.

'Why, Martha!' Sylvia had cried, clutching at her elbow for comfort. 'He didn't think we were a bit funny. He's just an old man!'

He *was* forty-five, if a day. Fifteen years older than Tom and Jimmy. A terrible gulf to bridge at twenty-eight. But now, somehow, gray and distinguished, he seemed no older. They had all caught up with him, that strange way you do with your elders in life. He had been wonderful with Nan. Never interfered at all with her fling. Just gone on in his own line, once he'd got her, being quite important and just a little pompous. He'd really grown to like Sylvia. Sylvia was so pretty. What man wouldn't?

And here he was, falling for Constance Tuckerman, at this late day! Constance, strange Vestal Virgin, who had always kept her lamp burning at some dim causal shrine. The war had been wonderful for Constance. That ambulance. It had really made her international. And she was lovelier far, at forty-three, than she had been at thirty, when Martha had

first known her. So slender and dark and romantic-looking. Her brown hair, with its one white Whistler lock, rippling smoothly back from her low forehead, her great brown eyes, gaunt with her strange impersonal ardors, almost persuading you that you believed as she did in the overwhelming importance of her cause. Why, it was a wonderful attachment! Martha could see Clif, now, down the ages, going to Geneva, meeting Dalmatians, attending Round Tables, sitting beside Constance on platforms, introducing the speaker of the evening with a few remarks.

And Nan really wouldn't care. You always came back to that. Who could have made Nan care, ever? That Pole, if he'd lived? Nan a Polish countess? That was very much in the picture. But Nan immured in Warsaw, Nan a Catholic convert, Nan dynastically producing male offspring to satisfy the demands of a line, represented, she remembered, in those far-off days of Nan's indecision about it all, as so exalted as to be almost royal?

Of course, if she *had* really cared she would never have become the Nan they knew. That was the answer. Loving changed you. According to whom you loved you were so different. That was true of all intimate companionship. Why, Tommy didn't even remotely suspect that child, that girl, she'd been for Hugh. And not at all because she hadn't tried to tell him. It was just an impression that you couldn't con-

vey. How could you ever adequately explain to any one how once you'd been — just otherwise!

That evening on this very porch, the night of Sylvia's eighteenth birthday party, she and Hugh alone under the stars and the clematis, with the strains of 'The Blue Danube' swirling out to them from the little stringed orchestra under the stairs. She had been joking about something or other and he had picked two purple blossoms and tucked them behind her ears and told her to stop thinking about life, just to feel it. She had said, a little tremulously, that thinking was more fun, and he — they were both seventeen — had quoted Yeats to her very earnestly. She could hear him now.

'You think you know yourself, Martha, but you don't. You think and check yourself and then you laugh.

> '"Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
> Run on the top of the dishevelled tide
> And dance upon the mountains like a flame!"'

How devoutly, that evening, though she'd only laughed, she had believed it. Well, after nineteen years of thought and laughter, didn't she somehow believe it still? Hug to her heart that little delusion that life with Hugh, whatever else you might have said for it, would have been, perhaps triumphantly, surely tempestuously — well, not the same? Queer where your thoughts led you, even at dinner parties!

'Whom is Nan bringing over from Lake Forest?' she asked inconsequently.

'Oh, an old friend of Sylvia's.' Jim's voice was abstracted as he dealt once more with the shaker. 'She telephoned. You must know him, Martha. Oh, here's Sylvia, now.'

Here was Sylvia, indeed, effulgent Sylvia, glittering in white and crystal, making her entrance, making her excuses, lovely and laughing and late.

'My dears! I'm so sorry! Nan telephoned. She's bringing a man. I had to reseat the table. And make Sally dress. Constance, you know my Sally. Willy, dear, I'm sitting the child between you and Jimmy. I will have the sexes even. It's hard — but you'll bear with it for my sweet sake. Love me, love my dog! She loves *you* for what you called us. It isn't every man, Willy, who can charm two women with one epigram!'

Willy's *mot* had been funny. 'The Beautiful and the Damned,' he had called them. Sylvia and Sally, her sixteen-year-old child. Sally, incredible product of modern civilization, mistress of herself and the situation, looking already, as Tom had said, 'as if she'd loved 'em and left 'em for years!' She stood now by Sylvia's side, watching with a faintly bored, faintly appreciative, expression her mother's graceful entry.

'Do your stuff, Mother, do your stuff!' Her dark, disillusioned little countenance seemed to say. 'It's good stuff and you get away with it!'

The image of her father she was — though fancy Jim thinking such thoughts of Sylvia! — just as dark and infinitely more disillusioned. Sylvia dressed her beautifully, but, in spite of that little scarlet frock, she suggested, standing straight and slim and boyish, with her closely cropped head, some worldly, decadent, very young man. And yet, when she smiled, perhaps only the son to look like Jimmy that Sylvia had always so wanted and had never had.

'Martha, dear, you look sweet to-night! I'm so glad you're here. Do you know whom Nan's bringing with her? Of all people, Hugh Cameron! He's with her for the week-end. Passing through town. I haven't seen him for years. Six or seven, anyway. I met his divorced wife last summer in Paris. She *did* marry that frog.'

Martha always wondered afterward how she'd looked at that moment. But faces were wonderful. Thirty-six-year-old ones, anyway, with a brain behind them! They so seldom betrayed you. But this — this was frightful. Hugh coming! Hugh! At any moment, now, down the maple avenue. No chance at all for preparation or escape. Not even a mirror. How trivial of her so to want one! How silly to feel that it would be such a comfort just to run to adjust her expression, poke in a hairpin, smile at herself, raise her eyebrows, assume that little arranged face that looked back at her from mirrors — ephemeral consolation — the face that changed, of course, in-

stantly, the moment she left the looking-glass for life.

They were all talking. That was lucky.

'Hugh Cameron? The painter?' Constance was already a little eager, the professional lion hunter, scenting distinction up the wind.

'They've got three of his things in the Metropolitan, now.' That was Willy. 'Worst ones he ever did, of course. Portraits of women. That Spanish landscape, the Pyrenees, in the National Gallery is a knock-out. Uneven, his work. But, God, he can paint!'

'Was he divorced?' That was Constance again.

And there was the horn of the Chrysler, sounding the trump of doom at the entrance. Nan, at the wheel, looking festive, even driving a car with that delightful, demanding little air that made any man within a mile of her look a fool dancing attendance. And beside her — not Hugh at all! Why, yes, of course it was! Hugh, himself, and, yes, utterly unchanged. Why hadn't she thought so at the first glance? Hardly any older. Not gray. Almost boyish. Yet what was that something? A veneer, a technique, a manner of turning toward Nan, of waving at Sylvia, a finish, a polish, something — not false, oh, no, not that! — but alien and sophisticated, and, yes, after all, older. Something, so obviously, he had learned by just being charming, oh, ever so charming, to so many women!

The party surged up to them. Nan did look so pretty. Hugh, shaking hands with Sylvia. Meeting Jim. Meeting Constance. Meeting Sally. Nodding to Clif. Speaking to Willy. 'Haven't seen *you* since the Riviera!' And then, seeing her! Breaking away from Constance. Coming up, eagerly and unaffectedly, *just* the same old Hugh, taking her hands, smiling down at her, speaking with the old catch in his voice, the old crooked smile.

'Why, Martha! *Martha!* How perfect to find you here! You look *just* the same! How *perfect!*'

And then somehow in a moment he'd managed it, forgetting Nan, forgetting Sylvia, forgetting even his own cocktail, and they were sitting together around the corner of the porch in an old wicker seat, looking out under the clematis to the lake beyond.

'Martha, how long is it? Since I saw you? Don't tell me. I know. Eleven years. On the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Streets in Boston, just in front of the old Tech buildings. I've never forgotten how lovely you looked. Do you remember?'

'Yes. I remember.' A wild desire to laugh rose hysterically in Martha. Those tears in the hotel bedroom. The anguish down the years.

'I hadn't seen you for ages before that. Not since you married. You had on a little dark blue hat with a pink rose on it and a blue face veil. Your cheeks looked so pink through it. You know — like fruit in a basket under netting. I tried a sketch of you after-

ward. It was pretty darn good, but I never finished it. I got the flesh tints, all right, but it wasn't you, somehow. I've got it still.'

'Hugh, do you remember those pen-and-ink things you did of me here at the lake one summer? Awfully Aubrey Beardsley?'

'Perfectly. Just after we discovered the "Yellow Book." Wonder what happened to them.'

'Oh, Hugh, I have them! I have them still. In my memory book. That's the kind of woman I am! Awful!'

'My dears.' It was Sylvia standing smiling before them. 'Dinner. Hugh, here's your cocktail. Drink it as we go in. I've put Constance Tuckerman on your other side. She does love a lion and my aim is always to please. Or reform! Martha, dear, I've given you Clif. He hates you to be funny and you so inevitably are! It's awfully good for him. Hugh, do you know how glad we are to have you here? The years just roll off my shoulders when I look at you!'

Sylvia's dining-room. The monstrosities of Victorian grill and golden-oak wainscoting mercifully dim in the twilight. The curtains drawn, shutting out the summer night. The table a pool of candlelight, a glitter of glass. Sylvia slipping to her place. Hugh bending devotionally over Constance. Clif brightening to see Sylvia on his other side. But Martha would have to talk to him because Sylvia was quite definitely taking possession of Hugh, and Constance was turn-

ing to Tom and taking up the saga of Mr. Snouritch just where she had left it on the piazza. How *could* she talk to Clif, to any one, with Hugh only three feet away, just across the dinner table? When she wanted so awfully just to watch, to look at him, to see what life had done to him, to understand.

'Those Dalmatians,' Clif was beginning conscientiously, 'were awfully interesting'

She had forgotten the Dalmatians! A Godsend! Clif would expound them indefinitely and the most exacting hostess could hardly blame her for not attending too closely.

'Clif, I so wanted to ask you' — this was really shameless — 'just what that Commission has been doing.'

'Well, ostensibly they are interested in disarmament. But Snouritch — he's a big man in Central Europe to-day, Martha ——'

He was off. This was splendid. She hoped she could keep looking intelligent. She wished she were invisible. No, rather, disembodied. Just two great eyes to see with, and an understanding heart! The more she looked at Hugh the more natural he seemed. Talking to Sylvia like that — why, it might be the eighteenth birthday party all over again. 'I love roads. They're like life. They can take you anywhere.' Where had *his* road taken him? Where was he now? Where was she?

Curious, how little she really knew about him.

Press notices, of course. Occasional paintings, happened upon, always unexpectedly, in chance galleries. Some talk. So little you could bear to listen to. Strange, when you cared enough you *couldn't* listen to others, who didn't care too, talking about concerns, so frightfully personal, that didn't concern them. Or you, either, for that matter.

Hugh's wife. She'd never seen her. But he'd done her over and over again those first years after their marriage. From the walls of how many galleries had that daffodil blonde looked impersonally down at her from some gold frame! She'd never liked the portraits. Though she'd heard critics say that living with that beauty had taught him to paint.

'Paint what?' Martha had thought disdainfully. Satin, long lustrous folds of it, clinging to a slender form? Soft velvets? Stiff taffetas? Transparent lace? Gleaming shoulders, too, and pearls, and soft hands, clasping diaphanous draperies? Technique, the critics said. Yes, but until she saw those Spanish pastels in that New Bond Street picture shop she had really thought that Hugh was never going to be anything more than a brilliant painter of lovely women. The kind you had do you because he could be trusted to make you look the way that, ten years from then, you could make even yourself believe you had!

Ah, but he had snapped out of it! How that discovery had dazzled her that dreary afternoon in the

little London shop that she had just drifted into because it was raining. Snapped out of it after that summer in the Pyrenees. And his pastels, to her discerning eye, had so clearly told the story. Something had *happened* to Hugh! Something glorious. It was true, then, that story that she had never let Nan really tell her. It was always just the people who *could* tell you things to whom you could never bring yourself to listen. And only because of some instinctive scruple that had nothing to do with voluntary principle at all. Just the caring had always protected her from all but the vaguest rumors.

His wife, of course, had divorced him. But so discreetly, and not until a year or two later. Not until, Martha shrewdly suspected, she had wanted that Frenchman for herself. Strange, with Hugh so subtly sophisticated, that it had been just a model. A Spanish peasant on the south slope of the Pyrenees. Strange that he'd loved her. Stranger that she'd left him. Stranger still that Martha, standing spellbound before his pictures, had felt that little London gallery so convincingly haunted by the ghost of that rumored romance. She knew, then, that it really *had* happened, though she'd never believed it. And how glad she unregenerately was that it had, if it had brought Hugh into his own again, set his feet on the path of high endeavor that would lead him, that *had* led him, to the stars. Curious, as she'd stood looking at the studies of that little Spanish jade, the kinship she'd

felt for her! They two, together, seemed leagued in Hugh's defense against the daffodil blonde!

Later, of course, he had done that landscape that was now in the National. The Pyrenees, tinged with what intangible emotion, hanging cloud-swept and unattainable, like a vision between heaven and earth. This, then, was what Hugh had found in life.

'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' Martha had thought humbly before it. But 'Interlude' he'd strangely called it. Was that how he had come to feel about the whole experience? Or was he whistling to keep his courage up? Probably not, for what was more impressed on you, as you grew older, than the episodic quality of life? You passed from one phase to another, opening and closing doors quite definitely, you saw in retrospect, on emotions that always, at the moment, convinced you that they were eternal. Still, some things lasted.

Incredible, to look at Hugh now, smiling serenely at Sylvia, to think that he had lived, actually lived, through all the days and hours and minutes that had gone to make up that experience! Was Clif still talking? He was, and with pleasure. Relieved, undoubtedly, because she was, indubitably, *not* being funny this evening! What hadn't he told her about the Dalmatians by this time? In what alien opinions, she wondered, had she monosyllabically acquiesced in the course of his tale?

But Sylvia was glancing at her a trifle uneasily.

Sylvia's slim white hand was touching the white Venetian swans on her table.

'We got them in Venice, Willy and I, didn't we, Willy?' she was saying. 'Doesn't that sound abandoned? I hope it does. But it doesn't, Willy. Not here. They all know you too well. Hugh doesn't, though. Hugh's a man of the world. He knows how life is lived and love is loved in the great open spaces of the Grand Canal! And he doesn't know Willy! It sounds abandoned to you, doesn't it, Hugh? Oh, say it does! Willy's and my big week at the Grand Hotel! Lovely to think those pure white swans were a souvenir of my one scarlet moment! But, really, the only emotion connected with them is green. Green envy. Green as grass. For I got home to find Martha had picked up some just as good at the Ten Cent Store! Martha's got such a gift for thrift. I hope Tommy appreciates it. Tommy, do you know your wife's not like other girls? Martha, tell what the clerk said to you that sold you those swans at the Ten Cent Store!'

Was Sylvia doing it on purpose? Had she noticed? Was she throwing out a life line? With Sylvia, you never could tell. Sweet Sylvia, who seemed so silly and was, in the last ditch, so understanding. Not thinking, but loving had taught Sylvia all she knew about life. Martha was grateful anyway. Time she snapped out of it. A line of Victorian verse slipped mockingly into her mind. Something young and

brave and sentimental. What was it? Of course, Matthew Arnold's 'Requiescat'!

> 'Her mirth the world required,
> She bathed it in smiles of glee.'

Well, she would, and damn glad she could, too, Martha thought profanely. She slipped easily, extravagantly, not at all anecdotally, into her story. They were all laughing at her. Laughing with her at her clever tongue. Tom twinkling at her from across the table. Darling people. Fun to make them laugh like that. Fun to be thought clever. Hugh's brown eyes were watching her amusedly, but amazedly too. Well, it *was* a trick she had picked up since she was seventeen. At seventeen she had been too shy ever to open her mouth in public. Did he find her so awfully different? Funny that, when to her he seemed so miraculously, so devastatingly, the same.

Willy, at her other elbow, was breaking in on her climax.

'Martha, we're made for each other! I always suspected it! You, too, have discovered the Ten Cent Store! Do you know that one on South Crawford Avenue, below Forty-Second Street? I bet you don't. Lunch with me Tuesday, Martha, at the Ravenna Restaurant. I bet you don't know that, either! I can recommend the ravioli and the Chianti is sublime. Trodden out of the purple grape by the bare, brown feet of the bootleggers' children in the washtubs of

Cicero! We'll go later to the Ten Cent Store. Shell flowers, they have there, that put Fifth Avenue to shame. And little Croatian salad plates at ten cents apiece ——'

This was fun, this was funny. This was her life. This, and Tommy. Dear, twinkling Tommy, not twinkling at all now, but drinking his glass of water so soberly and solemnly with that reflective expression that betrayed to wifely intuition that he was finding conversation with Constance a trifle hard to sustain! This was where *she* was! Where *her* road had taken her. Absurd to let just the sight of Hugh so jolt her out of it.

Was Sylvia rising? How soon it was over! The whole evening would go, just like that, before she'd had any definite impression, made up her mind about anything. How time could run on occasion! But your thoughts could return to it all. 'More and better conclusions as an aim in life!'

Sylvia's little gold coffee-cups. Pretty women in the lamplit room. Blue cigarette smoke trailing indefinitely from slender fingers. Desultory talk. Sally at the piano. The child could play sweetly. Nice not to think for a moment. Exhausting, really, hours like this last one. But they didn't come often, in a casual lifetime. Not often enough, really. Lovely, that gentle music and this sleepy feeling as if thought were paralyzed. Nice just not to think. To smoke. To rest.

How long before Nan spoiled it? Answering Constance's question. Explanatory. Vivacious.

'Why, he's here passing through from Omaha, of all places! He goes East to-morrow. He's been painting a cattle king's wife and two daughters. Fancy, Nebraska! God knows what he gets for it, but I'm sure he thought it was cheap at the price! He's sailing on Wednesday. Has a commission in London, he says, for some murals. But of course you know why he's really going?'

Martha was on her feet already. The very tone was too informing. But Nan's voice was rippling interestedly on.

'You mark my words, he'll marry that Mrs. Churchill Beekman of Tuxedo just as soon as she gets her Paris divorce. Why, my dear,' in answer to Sylvia's mute instinctive protest, 'he was with her every minute all spring, in Tangiers.'

'Oh, Nan! He was doing those water colors of the desert!' Sylvia's voice was defensive. 'I saw them myself, in New York, at Easter.'

But not even defense could keep Martha in the room a moment longer. Abruptly she pushed open the screened door.

'There's a slick moon,' she said evenly, as she passed out of the lamplight.

Wearily she crossed the piazza and sat down on the steps under the clematis, facing the lake. The moon was already high, up above the fringe of willow trees

that bordered the water. So serene, so lovely. Why be cast down by Nan? Nan, who always said things like that of every one. Didn't care how it sounded. Didn't know. 'Mrs. Churchill Beekman of Tuxedo'! It sounded formidable. Oh, well, probably it wasn't true. Half Nan's tales weren't, of course. But if not, now, Mrs. Churchill Beekman — absurd name — some day, inevitably, some one else. Ridiculous, grotesque, this recurrent conviction that Hugh was *her* Hugh. Just as strong now as on that day on the Boston street, eleven years before. Odd that she hadn't felt this way at all in the New Bond Street picture shop. And it wasn't just because that other affair was irrevocably over before she had ever believed in it. No, it was rather because, so obviously, that Spanish peasant had given him something precious, something worth the having, something beyond any one's right to question or deplore. But, for all she knew, Mrs. Churchill Beekman came bearing gifts of great price! Oh, intolerable, this agony, yes, real agony of spirit. Black and blue she felt, bruised and broken, from the force with which she had bumped into the dire image invoked by Nan of this Tuxedo siren!

She'd forget it. Forget it all. Withdraw from this absurd emotional whirlpool into the domestic duckpond of her own life. Withdraw, with such a spirit of devout thankfulness for Tom and the boys and Pussy! Wonderful to have a duckpond to withdraw

to! How was it Robert Frost's New England farmer had defined a home?

> 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
> They have to take you in.'

And then his wife, so beautifully,

> 'I should have called it
> Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'

Deserve! She had never deserved Tom, really. Running off all these years on her queer conjectural tangents! Finding him always there when she needed him. Something to build on, to tie to, to trust. Women were, somehow, never properly grateful for men.

She leaned her head back wearily on the old porch pillar, against the gnarled, trunk-like creepers of the vine. Spiders, perhaps, her pet abomination. But she didn't care. Restful, just to watch the moon and those few pale stars, dimmed by the moonlight in the luminous sky. Peaceful to have the world so lovely. Why, the moon was racing to-night. Or else time was. How long had she sat there? It was up, already, above the big elm tree on the lawn. How plume-like and dark and ponderous that elm did look against the light. How black its shadow on the silver grass.

Ah, the men were coming out from the dining-room. She could hear their deeper voices, movement, laughter, scraping of chairs, in the room behind her.

She must go in now. Go in and look at Hugh, gather some more impressions, bright little tiles of conjecture that she could eventually fit so carefully into the mosaic that would be her corrected picture of what he had become. She'd be sorry, later, if she didn't. Yet, somehow, what with Mrs. Churchill Beekman, she didn't want to. Didn't want to see him, being so different, looking so the same. The screened door opened abruptly. They were coming out on the porch. That would be nicer, with one's face in the shadow.

'Martha, where are you?' It was Hugh's voice. It was Hugh alone stepping blindly out of the lamplight.

'Here, Hugh, under the clematis.'

'Just where you used to be!' He spoke so happily, as he dropped down beside her. 'Or don't you remember?'

'"The Blue Danube"?' She laughed a little tremulously.

'Yes, and the purple blossoms. And other things less tangible. Oh, Martha, we *were* young! Young enough to be hungry! To wander off into the garden later and pick some gooseberries. Do you remember?'

'I remember every gooseberry,' she said so solemnly that they both laughed.

'You had a white net dress with little ribboned ruffles, long, down to your ankles, and a big black hair-ribbon. I can see you now, so slim in the starlight. Martha, it was perfect. *You* were perfect.

Pure glamour to look back on. And so untarnished. Martha, do you realize that I never even kissed you?'

'Oh, Hugh!' — still solemnly. She couldn't help it. 'Could I remember every gooseberry and forget that?'

'What happened to us, Martha?' Hugh looked so troubled about it all, so boyish. 'I've never understood.'

'Oh, I have, Hugh!' Indeed she had. She had worked it all out long ago. Her bright little mosaic rose before her eyes as she spoke. 'Just life — and youth. The young are so helpless. And so pathetically docile. They think the world is their oyster. But circumstance conquers them. They don't know, yet, that they can surmount that. Distance, you know, and time, and incident. And then, of course, they don't know how precious a thing they have to lose. Until it's gone. It was just college. Your father selling the place. Your never coming back to the lake again after that summer. Europe for you. Chicago for me.'

'It was a thing I couldn't handle, Martha. You couldn't understand. I felt so helpless. You grew up ahead of me. I was a boy in Paris when you married.'

'You'd done your first big canvas, Hugh. You'd gone to glory! What fun you must have had! Just a child, really. Oh, Hugh! Your life — hasn't it been splendid? Haven't you loved it?'

'Yes.' His voice was uncertain. 'It's been nice.

All lives, I fancy, are more or less alike inside. And you, Martha? What about you? I don't have to ask. I can see. You've been happy. Tom and those two boys.'

'And Pussy!' Martha's voice was eager. 'Did you know that I'd achieved Pussy?'

'No. I hadn't heard about her. Martha — you *have* been happy?'

'Why, Hugh! Of course!' A little white flame of loyalty burned bright within her. 'Tom's a darling. He's been darling to me always.' Why did it sound so strained, so stupid? Dear twinkling Tommy! 'And lots of friends. Old ones, you know. And new ones, too. And things to think about. Just thinking, Hugh — that's the real fun.'

'Martha! Don't tell me you think that still!' Hugh's voice was almost desperate. 'Feeling's the thing. That's all there *is*! Just those few moments, so few and far between, in which you really feel!'

'Hugh' — this was just being seventeen over again. She tried to make her voice sound practical. Almost severe. 'Hugh, you're a Romantic!'

'But you are, too, Martha, really. If you'd only admit it! You always were. An unawakened one! Don't you see? Don't you realize? How you're wasted? Just as an audience, no matter how discerning? You're far too precious, can't you understand, just to applaud the play!'

Martha rose to her feet a little unsteadily.

'Hugh, dear, don't. You said it all before, nineteen years ago, under this very clematis.'

Was it because of the moonlight that he seemed to be looking down at her so tenderly?

'"I *could* have made you ride upon the winds, run on the top of the dishevelled tide ——"' He stopped. The notes of a piano broke in upon the silver stillness of the summer night. Martha recognized the air at once. She knew what had happened. Sylvia had asked Sally to sing. That little lyric of Sara Teasdale's that had been set so charmingly to music. Whatever devastation modern life had wrought in the sixteen-year-old countenance, the sixteen-year-old soprano remained the fresh and lovely thing that it had been in the dayspring of the world. The soft, young tones of Sally's voice floated out clearly through the open door and window, every word distinct above the tinkling accompaniment of Sylvia's old cottage piano.

It was a night of early spring,
The winter sleep was scarcely broken,
Around us shadows and the wind
Listened for what was never spoken.

Though half a score of years are gone,
Spring comes as sharply now as then —
But if we had it all to do,
It would be done the same again.

It was a spring that never came.
But we have lived enough to know
That what we never have remains.
It is the things we have that go.

Had they been staring dumbly into each other's eyes all the time the child was singing? A little burst of applause broke from the listening group within-doors. Hugh drew in his breath sharply. Martha heard herself gasp as if in reply. That devastating, that shattering sense of just his nearness. In a moment his arms were around her, his lips were groping eagerly, awkwardly, about her ear and hair. Martha recognized the clumsy little kiss in a moment and wondered if Hugh did too. It was the timid ghost of the one she had never known, nineteen years before. Virginally she slipped from his embrace. Boyishly he released her.

'Martha,' he said quickly, 'Martha ——'

There was a murmur and a movement from the hallway behind them. The sound of moving furniture, of voices and of laughter. The screened door opened and Tom's genial tones rang out.

'Martha, where are you? Do you know it's 11.15 and I have to get those kids into school to-morrow morning on the 7.50?'

Nan's slender figure appeared beside him in the doorway.

'Hugh, are you there?' She peered prettily into the darkness. 'What are you doing, out necking with Martha in the moonlight? We've got to be on our way. We won't get to Lake Forest before one o'clock in the morning as it is.'

In a moment the dinner party was all about them, a

little festive chaos of movement and laughter and gay retort.

'Don't go! The night's young yet!' That was Sylvia.

'Have a whiskey-and-soda!' That was Jim.

'Oh, what a moon!' That conventional ecstasy could only be Constance.

'Weren't we fools to sit indoors all evening?' That was Nan.

'God! What a night for a girl!' That was Willy, being abandoned.

But they were all already drifting vaguely around the old Victorian piazza to the carriage entrance, where their wraps were dropped casually on the hickory porch furniture and the motors waited, incongruously parked in the small carriage circle. Martha lost Hugh the moment they stepped out from under the old clematis. She never could remember just how either of them got to the front door. And then, somehow, she was sitting in the front seat of the Buick and Tom was walking around the car to climb in beside her and Hugh was standing by the running board, looking up at her helplessly, desperately, in spite of all that little acquired air of sophistication that sat so easily on his slim, still young, shoulders.

'Hugh,' she said quickly, a little shakily, 'it's been lovely seeing you like this, talking to you, being with you again. It's been —— Oh, my dear, what is there

to say? But I want you to understand. Really, I mean. I want you always to know.'

And then Tom was beside her and she heard the gears grinding, and, all in a moment, they were crunching slowly around Sylvia's short gravel turn-around and Hugh was left standing under the old-fashioned Victorian porte-cochère. Martha, looking back through the silver moonlight, heard Nan, waiting behind in the little tan Chrysler, call him twice, once quite sharply, before he turned to jump in beside her with that little provocative air of conspicuous gallantry that so many women had found, and were still to find, so charming.

ARMS AND THE BOY

Of course, Michael always came back to it — if you were in Europe on your honeymoon, you couldn't tell your wife you wouldn't go to Paris. You couldn't tell Barbara, at any rate, who had been confidently counting, since the early days of their engagement, on buying the better part of a belated trousseau on the Rue de la Paix.

'You'll have to accept her, Michael,' said his prospective mother-in-law, with the humorous efficiency for which she was justly famous, 'as is. She'll have only one trunk and a hatbox. It's absurd to buy frocks in Chicago to wear in Paris. She won't need any clothes in England. She can just follow you about like Lady Godiva until she crosses the Channel, and get all she needs for the winter at Lanvin's before she comes home.'

'The styles,' said Barbara, shaking her boyish bob, 'don't offer a modern Godiva all the protection a careful mother should ask for her daughter. But I *don't* see myself buying a trousseau in the corn belt! You don't care what I wear, do you, Micky? As long as I come?'

He made the appropriate answer. But he knew his face was troubled.

'I thought,' he said — 'I thought we might stay in England. Barbara loves it and so do I. Not — not go to France at all.'

The startled faces of the ladies made him realize his mistake.

'Not go to France?' said his future mother-in-law crisply. 'When you're in Europe?'

'Well,' he compromised, 'not Paris. The French country's so pretty. We might motor, you know. Do — do the cathedrals. Tour Brittany, maybe. The scenery's lovely. We won't have much time.'

'Cross three thousand miles of ocean,' said the incredulous dowager, 'and come home without a Paris model? At that rate, Michael, you might just as well spend your honeymoon at Niagara Falls. There's plenty of scenery right here in the United States.'

But Barbara noticed his discomfiture. Her little hand slid gently into his own.

'I want to see Paris with you, darling,' she said. 'I was such a kid that I never realized the war. But it was the biggest thing in your life, next to me. I want to know, right on the spot, Micky, just what it did to you. Don't forget you were our little tin hero all through it! I was only ten when your mother came over to say you'd got the D.S.C. But I'll never forget it. First time I'd ever seen grown-ups cry.'

Mrs. Boynton smiled benignly as Michael clasped the little clinging fingers.

'Hero worshiper!' she said caustically. 'Don't spoil him, Barbara!' But her shrewd gray eyes were slightly misted.

Michael felt a lump rise in his throat. Confound-

edly complicated, life. If you took it hard. Of course, some didn't.

Neither did he, most of the time, and the bright spring days of his engagement were really cloudless. It was such fun, having, at last, a vested right in Barbara. Watching her boyish little figure capering about on tennis courts and golf links. Seeing her eager little face, at luncheon and dinner parties, twinkling provocatively up at other men. Knowing now, with such heartening security, that she thought them all frightful fools, irrelevant subsidiary characters in the graceful social comedy she'd played so charmingly since she was seventeen.

It was a queer, glamorous time of tremulous inner happiness and strange extraneous excitement. He hadn't thought an engagement would be so spectacular. Every one was so excited. Every one was so happy. Barbara childishly ecstatic over her new solitaire and the dazzling wedding presents that came drifting in as soon as the day was set for the ceremony. His young sisters, both to be bridesmaids, passionately preoccupied with lace and chiffon, making desperate decisions with Barbara over the relative merits of pink or blue. His mother serenely sentimental. His father crustily so. Not every one's luck to have an only son marry the nineteen-year-old daughter of a lifelong friend! Mrs. Boynton sincerely delighted if a bit distracted, herself, by irrelevant thoughts on color schemes for the altar.

He was happier than any one, of course. And awfully excited. Sure of himself. And sure of Barbara. Sure of the years that stretched glittering before him in the May sunshine.

But, nevertheless, he didn't want to go to Paris. Not with Barbara. Not on his honeymoon. Not for years, maybe. And then, surely, alone. With a chance to reflect on life detachedly. Revalue, on its merits, that early experience that had meant so devastatingly much to him.

Why had it, he wondered? Wasn't he like other men? Nine years, now, since the war, and the memory of Marthe was as fresh as if she'd happened to him yesterday. How little a dispassionate observer would make of the incident. He, a college kid in khaki, with the gold bar of the second lieutenant on his slender shoulders. She, a wistful little fly-by-night from the Paris pavements. A commonplace romance enough, of the cafés and boulevards. Or so it would seem to the dispassionate observer. Nothing to cling to in thought for nine long years.

And yet he had. Marthe was the answer, of course. He'd felt a dog to leave her. Had felt he couldn't, really, that early March morning in the Gare Saint-Lazare. He'd never forget the incredible agony of the moment when the silly little trumpet of the guard tooted the warning of their last farewell. But trains pull out, and lovers' arms are parted. The war was over. And he was twenty. And she was — Marthe.

He was going home to get his degree at Princeton to please his father. And she? Back to the pavements, he presumed, though she'd never said so. Never threatened. Never argued. Never demanded. Just loved him, as he'd loved her. Thoughtlessly, happily, hopelessly, at the end. Both children, of course. Unfit to handle life. Though the situation in which they found themselves, at any age, would take some handling.

Nineteen he was, passing for twenty-one, when he had gone to war. Why, his nurse should have gone with him! He'd have been glad enough of old Maggie's company, those first lonely months in the barracks at the Camp de Saint-Maur. What a life it had been for a kid just off a college campus! Le Cours Pratique d'Artillerie Lourde Tracteur.

Interesting work, of course, dealing with tractors, caterpillars, and tanks, under the expert direction of the French lieutenants. Better than Plattsburg. His kind of thing, too. Lucky to draw it. Why, at nineteen, he'd really rather have spent an afternoon puttering over the inner intricacies of a gasoline engine than in any other occupation on God's green earth! He liked the 'problems' set him by his instructors. Got a thrill, always, in dragging his fifteen-ton gun successfully out of his swamp and setting it up in the required position. His fellow officers never understood his childlike predilection for floundering in and out of mud and water! Well, he wasn't as far removed

as they from the age of mud pies. Didn't mind a little healthy dirt and got a great kick, always, out of a crank shaft. Liked the lectures, too, as well as the maneuvres. Made him think of Princeton.

No, it wasn't the work that shook his nerve. It was the leisure. He found he had entered, at the Camp de Saint-Maur, a practical course in more recondite matters than heavy artillery. There was nothing, either in the camp or Paris, for a kid to do. He knocked about, of course, with other officers. Sat at their mess and listened to their disillusioned talk of war and wine and women. Tagged along with them when they went to Paris, got a good meal, and far too much good liquor. Took in an unintelligible show. Or walked the pavements. Feeling a kid. A helpless, homeless kid.

The pavements were the worst. Streets full of women, edging close to him, leering up at him, whispering their sibilant seductions in his unwilling ear. Scared to death of them, he was, and hoped they didn't know it! Just walked along, with beating heart and head held high, shamefully conscious of his flushed cheeks and miserable embarrassed eyes. Hating his youth and his inadequacy, and, above all, his fear.

With other males about, he felt a slight bravado. He could swagger into a restaurant or down a street, in line with fellow officers, and feel himself a man among men. Tell stories, too, of *filles de plaisir* and *maisons de tolérance*, with heartening conviction. But

when his companions fell off, one by one, at cafés and street corners, responding, each with a self-conscious laugh and idle pleasantry to the woman that seemed, for the moment, worth the response, leaving him alone with his strange unused confusion in the murmurous mystery of the Paris streets, he was always the prey of panic.

He'd had three months of it when Marthe had found him. God, he was lonely! Would it never end? Why didn't they send him into action? He seemed no nearer the front in Paris than he'd been at Yaphank. And considerably farther from home. He was strolling down the Boulevard Mont Parnasse that wet March evening, trying to kill the time until he could go back to his bed in the Hôtel Voltaire. Sorry he'd left the camp. Though it had seemed absurd to waste a week-end's leave outside of Paris. He stopped at The Dome for a drink. Viewed distastefully the little iron tables on the sidewalk and sank gingerly down in a puddle in an iron chair.

Of course, before he got his drink he got his woman. A feminine figure slipped resolutely into the seat opposite. The conventional phrase of invitation fell upon his ear. He never even looked at her. Just pulled himself together and tried to appear a man and an officer. A hardened boulevardier, disillusioned by experience.

'Pas — pas ce soir, mademoiselle,' he said, with faltering bravado.

The figure did not move. He sat rigidly upright in his chair, his eyes fixed firmly on the boulevard before him. The street was filled with moving traffic, black and glittering in the light spring rain. The sharp toots of the taxis rang in his ears. The voice went on, in English:

'You are ennuyé, monsieur. Do you find that necessary in Paris? You look young and lonely. Like me.'

He turned a startled gaze on his discerning critic. A wet, shabby little figure. But yes, disarmingly young, and possibly lonely. There was a reassuring pathos in the great dark eyes that looked meditatively up at him from under the flopping hatbrim. He succumbed to a sudden impulse.

'Would you like a drink?' he asked. They always did, but, in instinctive apology for the crudity of his intuition, he added courteously, 'It's pretty cold.'

'Merci, monsieur,' she said, and gave her order. 'Mine is a chilly trade.'

'You — you speak English beautifully,' he said at length, at a loss as to how to break the little pause.

'I have had — opportunities to learn it,' she commented briefly. 'And it's good business.'

'It's good business, anyway, isn't it?' he asked. A profession so congested, he felt, must have its rewards.

'I haven't found it so,' she answered, and laughed up at him, thrusting out a slender leg to display an

orchid stocking with a long rent run in it and a shabby little slipper, saturated with rain. 'Very poor pickings, if you ask me!'

Her laugh was like a child's. In curious contrast with the irony of her speech.

'How old are you?' he asked impulsively.

'Nineteen,' she said. 'And that's the truth.'

He felt it was.

'And you?' she asked with impudence.

He felt the color rising in his cheeks.

'Twenty,' he said. But added honestly, 'Next month.'

'Un enfant perdu,' she smiled. 'Like me! Tous les deux, waifs of the war.'

'What's your name?' he asked.

'Marthe.'

'Mine's Michael.'

'Michael?' she questioned. 'Ah — Michel! Comme l'archange! After the archangel.'

'No,' he said humorously, with a thought for his Presbyterian background. 'After my grandfather.'

Her drink was finished. She looked cold and very wistful.

'Would you — would you like some supper? On the understanding, that is, that you're just wasting your time.'

'Time is never wasted at supper!' she declared gayly. 'J'ai toujours faim.'

'Me, too,' said Michael.

'That is because we are nineteen!' she laughed. 'We are still growing!'

'Let's eat, then,' he said eagerly. Great this was, finding again the companionship of youth.

'Not here,' she protested. 'I know a little place around the corner, off the boulevard. Better. Et beaucoup moins cher.'

They set off together, arm in arm, through the spring drizzle.

Sitting opposite Marthe in the warm little restaurant with the sanded floor, leaning his elbows on the clean, coarse tablecloth, looking into her great brown eyes across the roll of bread and the carafe of vin rouge, waiting for his order of 'poulet rôti, beaucoup des legumes et fraises à la crême,' Michael was sublimely unconscious of a fall from grace.

This jolly little supper, on a clear understanding, with a charming contemporary, seemed, in fact, the cleanest fun he'd had offered him since he'd landed in France. Marthe's views on wine and war and women, for one thing, were so much less disillusioned than those of the officers' mess.

'No more liquor,' she said, as he gave his order. 'I only drink professionally.' And a little later, in response to a comment of his own on the Paris streets:

'C'est dégoutant — but you mustn't judge the nation by women like me. You don't know the others.' And finally:

'La guerre? I am not afraid. It will come, le jour du riposte! We will fight jusqu'au bout. We will make peace in Berlin. I know. I come from Arras, Michel.'

'A refugee?'

'Certainement. Everything wiped out. A shell killed my mother in the bombardment.'

'Any more family?'

'Not now,' she said, and straightened in her chair. 'My father died on the Aisne. Tué sur le champ d'honneur. He had the Médaille Militaire. My brother was shell-shocked. He shot himself back of the lines. No medals for him. Mort pour la patrie, quand même.'

He made a gesture of sympathy. She checked him with a shrug of her slender shoulders.

'C'est dur, Michel. But it's every one's story.'

It wasn't until they had finished supper that she made her proposition. They had divided the last strawberry between them, and Michael sat looking appreciatively at his charming companion, loath to forsake her and the comfort of the little restaurant for the loneliness and damp of the city streets.

'Well,' he said, 'I guess I've got to leave you.'

'It has been nice,' she answered, 'our petit quart d'heure.'

'It's been bully,' he said. 'Let's have another some evening.'

She looked plaintively up at him.

'Michel,' she said, 'you know you are not happy. Couldn't I make you so? It need not be the way you hate, sordid, on the pavements. I am — what you see. Mais je suis restée malgré ça honnête. At heart. Is that impossible to believe?' Her hand sought his across the table. 'Take me for your petite amie. It would not be expensive, Michel. I could live in a little room for two hundred and fifty francs a month. It — it would save you money. I would be faithful, Michel. I promise that' — her eager voice was breaking — 'and très reconnaissante.'

Michael felt his ears were burning. He looked miserably down at her.

'I — I couldn't do it, Marthe. You — you don't understand.'

'You have no money? When do you get your pay?'

'The first of the month. But it's not that ——'

'You don't like me, then? I do not attract you?' No coquetry in her tone. Just stark anxiety.

'Of course I do! Of course you do!' He stammered in confusion. 'But, Marthe, I — I just couldn't do it. You don't get the point. I — I don't go with women. Why, I'm just a kid. A — a college boy at home.'

Her wide brown eyes were puzzled, non-comprehending. She gave a little shrug and rose from her chair.

'Ah, well,' she said, 'I'm sorry. Mais qu'importe?'

'You'll meet me again?' he asked eagerly. 'Like this, I mean, for supper?'

'Of course,' she said. He scribbled down her address. They parted on the threshold. He watched her hurrying down the street. At the crossing she turned to wave gayly through the drifting rain.

'A une autre fois!' she called lightly back to him, and vanished in the traffic.

After that, of course, he saw her often. She was full of the gayest little plans for innocent amusement. She found him new, cheap restaurants in funny little corners. She translated the unintelligible shows. He took great satisfaction in laughing loudly, if a little late, at all the Gallic jokes, and great comfort in the fact that she didn't know any more than he did about ordering a sophisticated dinner. She shared all his terrors for a worldly head waiter and, at five in the afternoon, he discovered, much to his relief, she would rather seek stimulus in pâtisserie than a cocktail. She picnicked with him, a little coldly, in the budding Bois, and took him to Saint-Cloud, in lilac time, by steamboat on the Seine. She planned ingenious bus-rides to show him a Paris he did not know existed, an innocent, picturesque Paris of winding gray streets and little cobbled alleys, of old stone churches in unexpected corners, of little fenced-in parks and great deserted squares.

And, above all, she saved him from the women. With Marthe on his arm he was safe from molesta-

tion on the brightest, broadest boulevard, in the darkest, most twisted little lane. He called her his little M.P., and she accepted the title. In saving the privates from the perils of the pavements, he assured her, the military police would find in her their ablest ally.

She never repeated the proposal that she'd made him that first evening. But the sinister shadow of her means of livelihood hung over him a little heavily, in moments of uneasy reflection in the camp. It was somehow incredible that he, Michael, impeccable product of Presbyterianism and Princeton, had slipped into easy, friendly association with a veritable *dame des trottoirs*. She was that, of course, just like the others, but she didn't seem so. She loved a good time, as he did himself. She seemed very young. Younger, in some ways, than the girls at home, in spite of her experience. She hadn't had so much fun.

The thought of her came gradually to fill his every waking moment. Her great brown eyes looked up at him from the inner intricacies of the gasoline engines. Her slender figure stood beside his tractor in the swamps. The echo of her light, laughing voice drowned out even the uproar of the officers' mess. If it weren't for her flaming patriotism, he decided, he'd be in danger of forgetting what he'd come over for. But he didn't. There was more poignant reminder of his heroic destiny in her tragic discussion of the last German advance than in all the camp routine of

lecture and maneuver, in all the disillusioned discussion of advancement and promotion in the officers' mess.

It was the end of May when he received his orders. To proceed next morning to join the Twelfth Field Artillery of the Second Division at Vaux. He was dining that evening with Marthe in Paris. He went in town early and bought her a little gold bracelet to give her with his news. He had such fun selecting it, with the rather tremulous thought of clasping it, very gratefully, on her little white wrist. She'd be as glad as he to hear he was off for the fighting forces, at last.

She was waiting for him on the usual corner. He couldn't wait a moment to spill his news. As soon as she'd tucked her little hand in the crook of his khaki sleeve, he told her.

'I'm off to-morrow to win the war, Marthe,' he said. 'So you can stop worrying. I guess it will be over by Wednesday.'

She stood quite still on the crowded pavement. He felt her little fingers clutch his arm. Her face was very white as she looked up at him.

'Michel!' she said. That was all. And again, 'Oh, Michel!'

'Vaux,' he said happily, 'and that means fighting.'

'Yes,' she said, 'of course it does. And I know what *that* means. If you don't.'

'Why, Marthe,' he protested, 'I'm crazy to go.

What did I come over for? Not to hang around Paris for nothing.'

The shadow deepened on her somber face.

'Of course not,' she said. 'Of course not.'

He felt a pang of remorse.

'I'll see you again, Marthe,' he urged eagerly. 'I'll get back on leave. And we can write. I'll think of you, you know, wherever I am.'

'And I of you, Michel,' she said gently.

After that the evening passed quite happily. They had a splendid dinner. With a pint of champagne. And the bracelet was a magnificent success. Marthe wept quite frankly when he clasped it on her arm. They lingered long over their liqueur and coffee. But he had to get back to the camp. He'd left all his packing to do before dawn. She walked with him to his tram at midnight. He stood, silent and awkward, on the street corner, holding her little hand in his. In an instant, now, it would be over.

'Au revoir, Michel,' she said steadily. 'I will look for you. And pray for you. To Saint Michel, to watch over his child.' Her composure was superb. Much better than his own.

'Thank you,' he said weakly.

The moment had come. But he had no words for farewell. Though somehow he couldn't release her clinging fingers. Suddenly she looked up at him, her little face pale in the darkness.

'You must kiss me, Michel,' she said quickly,

'really, you must kiss me.' There was a note in her voice he'd never heard before. The little face was transfigured with desperate emotion. He took her suddenly in his arms. She clung to him mute and breathless for a moment, then turned her lips to his.

'I love you,' she said.

A kiss was his only answer. He was far beyond utterance. Shattered by the wave that broke over him of unexpected and devastating emotion.

'I'll come back,' he said, thickly, at last. 'I — I didn't know it was like this. I'll come back to you, Marthe! Why, I — I've *got* to!'

'You've got to stay, Michel,' she whispered softly. 'Don't leave me, now. Not like this. Not yet. You've got to stay. I love you.'

Again a kiss seemed the only answer. Remotely, through the waves breaking over him, Michael heard the rumble of the departing tram.

'You love me, Michel. You know you do. I know it, now,' she murmured in his arms. In the intoxicating sense of her nearness and dearness he wasn't even conscious of a struggle. Another kiss, another whispered protestation, and, holding her, still thrilling to his embrace, bending to look into her ecstatic face, Michael turned away with her in the night.

Dawn was breaking when he reached the camp in his taxi. Just time there was to throw essentials into his kit, leave orders for further packing, and join his three fellow officers on the supply truck that was to

take them to the front. Numb he was, still, and dumb with emotion. What was war, what was death, in the face of the shattering revelation that was life? He responded to the sallies of his companions as in a trance. Astounded to hear the commonplace words that issued from his lips. Getting away with it, too. They didn't seem to think he was queer. But anæsthetized he was, in body and spirit, by the experience he'd passed through. Still with Marthe, in some strange, disembodied communion. Shut away from the world of reality by the memory of her face, her voice, her touch. And above all, by the thought of his own overwhelming emotion.

All day it lasted, that strange disembodied communion, as he sat in the jolting supply truck, looking out at the late spring landscape with listless, unseeing eyes. Nothing served to break his abstraction. Not the jokes of his traveling companions, nor the war-worn appearance of the country. Not the craters in the shell-wrecked pavement. Not the squad of German prisoners, standing dazed and despondent at a crossroads, nor the line of American wounded, met later in a village square. Not even that other line of khaki-clad troops, passed after nightfall, plodding along the muddy road to the ceaseless rumble of the distant guns, the relief 'going up,' under cover of darkness.

'Shame to be missing all this,' thought Michael, with a flash of his old humor. A shell had burst un-

comfortably near them, and the chauffeur, without protest from his martial companions, had promptly stepped on the gas. 'There must be a great kick in it for those who are here. Too bad to be absent at one's own baptême de feu!'

But absent he was, and absent he remained, throughout their reception by the regimental commander and their assignment to duty. A shy, embarrassed boy he must have seemed to the command to which he was presented. Grateful to the gruff, omniscient sergeant, who obviously figured that the kid was scared into speechlessness by the ordeal before him. Dead tired, he turned in for the night. Too tired to think, now, even of Marthe. Too tired not to sleep.

He had, of course, his bewildered reactions in the days that followed. Times when he couldn't believe that it had really happened. Moments of incredulous remorse. But no real regrets. He came to think of Marthe less often, in the conflicting impressions that crowded in on him in the confusion and fatigue of the fighting. But he never ceased to long for that leave that would take him to Paris. Never doubted that his first act, on achieving his freedom, would be to return to her arms. No use worrying about the future. He mightn't have one, anyway. *Carpe diem*, the proverbial philosophy of the warrior, had become his own.

It was under the early June stars, that made him remember the towers of Princeton, that he took his

first command, and he fought steadily through the months of early summer. It was late July when he saved his battery from the Boche assault and won his D.S.C. A great fuss about nothing, it seemed to him, quite honestly, at the time. They fell back before they took it. That was all there was to it. You didn't leave your guns. And the retreating infantry rallied in time. Why, he wasn't even scratched in the fracas.

It was very ingloriously, back of the lines, a month later, that he received his congé, from a shell bursting at high noon in the ruins of a village street. Lucky not to lose his leg. He thought he had, until he reached Neuilly, the perfect peace of the American hospital and the blessed consultation of the Paris surgeons. A nightmare it had been, his evacuation from the dressing-station at the front. Lying there, in his clean white bed, mercifully relieved at last from both pain and panic, he dictated a cable to his father, a letter to his mother and a note to Marthe.

Next day she came to him. He opened his eyes on her suddenly, as she stood at his bedside. Lovely, she looked, in a new silk frock and a little cherry-colored hat, pulled down over her dark eyes. He'd been sending her his pay, of course, but he hadn't thought that clothes would make such a difference. She was smiling tremulously. And her eyes were filled with tears.

'Michel,' she said, 'you have come back to me.'

'I said I would,' he answered, and attempted a smile. She bent quickly over him.

'Mon amour,' she whispered, her lips against his cheek. He felt her tears, mingling with his own. Weakness it was, of course, just weakness. He felt strangely foolish and happy and much too tired to talk. It was lovely just to look at her again. She didn't stay long and, in leaving, she said casually:

'What is your home address? I will cable your mother.'

He looked up in amazement at this incredible statement. She smiled serenely down at him.

'I will sign a man's name, Michel. A Frenchman's name. She will want to know that a friend has seen you. That the French will watch over you. That you are with those that care.'

There was no disputing this infallible intuition. And Marthe looked so sweet and so serious. Michael meekly surrendered himself into her hands. Somehow he felt unregenerately tickled at the thought of the origin and the destination of that considerate wire. Marthe seemed an integral part of his life, already. He was rapidly growing abandoned. 'The descent into hell *is* easy,' he reflected with a thought for the Virgil of his school days.

After that she came every afternoon. And he grew rapidly stronger. His leg was saved, in spite of the gangrene. But his knee would never be right. No more fighting for him, the surgeons said, with a solemnity in which tacit congratulation mingled with a show of condolence. Invalided home on crutches,

they prophesied, a hero, with his cross and his wound stripe.

But he didn't want to go. Not a bit he didn't. Before he had time to worry much on the chance, he received his orders to remain in Paris. To report, when discharged, to the Q.M.C. headquarters. Put in the rest of the war, he would, distributing canned goods! The S.O.S.! A job for a grocer! But better than Princeton, with heroes in the trenches. And, maybe, near Paris. Near enough to see Marthe. Now and then.

As soon as they'd let him out for an hour in a taxi, he reported to the adjutant-general. Hobbled up on his crutches to the official desk and waited, in incredible suspense, to know his fate. Too good to be true, it was! Transferred to the Division of Transports. A desk job in Paris. He hurried back to Neuilly in a state of tumult and exhaustion. And there was Marthe, waiting for him in the hospital garden. He swung himself down the gravel walk, evading the nurses hovering solicitously about, and sank on the iron bench beside her.

'It's all right, Marthe,' he said. 'Paris. I won't have to leave you.'

Her face was radiant. And instantly she began to plan.

'I will get a little room for us, Michel. I know one on the Rue des Saints-Pères. Really an appartement. Such a nice room, with an alcove, overlooking a

courtyard. Not noisy. Convenient. Et pas trop cher. I will talk to the concierge, Michel. He would take advantage of un soldat Américain. I will arrange it myself. Les affaires sont les affaires.'

Michael gazed blissfully at this woman of business. Distractingly pretty she looked in the bright October sunshine. Impossible to believe, somehow, the happiness that was before him. All that life used to hold, good fun and hard work and the distractions of the intellect — and then, all this besides. All this that he had found in Marthe. The flower of life. That strange exotic bloom, the existence of which he had never, in his innocence, comprehended. He was giddy with the scent of it, sitting close beside her beneath the golden leaves of the lime trees, and her pretty, practical prattle of francs and centimes fell on deaf, if devoted, ears.

Nevertheless, slightly apprehensive as he was of responsibilities so recklessly assumed, it was a comfort to find himself completely relieved of all sordid preoccupation with ways and means. The concierge met his match in Marthe, and they were soon established in unbelievable economy on the Rue des Saints-Pères.

Michael was happy there beyond his dreams of earthly happiness. He hadn't a friend in Paris, bar the officers he met in the S.O.S. He knew they sized him up as a taciturn kid, capable enough to hold down his job, but too young to share with them the diversions of war-time Paris. He grinned a bit, in private,

over this snap judgment, but he never cared to correct it. His memories of the pleasures of the boulevards were anything but alluring. He was strictly a family man, and hurried home every evening to the Rue des Saints-Pères to fare forth with Marthe to some familiar little restaurant, in a state of radiant contentment.

Marthe hadn't a friend in Paris, either, and gay, provocatively pretty, and pathetically thankful for his unswerving devotion, she was always awaiting him on the threshold. She lived in a trance of love and gratitude and flaming thrift. She took their ménage so completely for granted that Michael found it impossible to question the status on which it was established. For her such irregularity was entirely regular, and she radiated an atmosphere of practical domesticity that rendered misgiving absurd. Michael laughed at her and loved her. In the first joy of their reunion they knew no foreboding.

It was the Armistice that struck the note of doom that brought home to them the ephemeral quality of their happiness. Four weeks after their establishment in the Rue des Saints-Pères hostilities ceased. They clung together, from that moment, a little desperately, not planning for the future, not speaking of separation, but never dreaming that they could control their destiny. Just waiting, with the despairing docility of a war-schooled generation, for the order from above that would destroy their paradise.

It was long in coming. Four months he'd had with her when he received his orders to join a troop ship at Cherbourg to return to the States. She never put up any fight to keep him. Useless, of course. Uncle Sam's orders were not to be gainsaid. But with pathetic resignation she never begged nor argued for his return.

'C'est fini, Michel,' she said, accepting her inevitable place in the eternal scheme of things with heart-breaking humility. For his part, he felt he couldn't accept it.

'I'll come back to you, Marthe. Only wait for me,' he urged. 'I'll manage somehow.'

She listened to his passionate reassurance with a curious little air of detached and tender cynicism. For the first time Michael read a lack of trust in her despairing eyes.

'You think so,' she said simply. 'But you won't. You'll find you can't. I knew it couldn't last. And now — it's over.'

He hated her worldly wisdom. It shook his self-confidence. It reminded him anew of his youth and inexperience. He needed her faith, now, to sustain his own. But she had none to offer him. He hated the very bravery with which she faced their inevitable separation. It seemed somehow rooted in the dreadful disillusion of her calling.

He put in a frightful fortnight on board the troop ship. Of course he had to take it. No argument with

Uncle Sam. But surely a desperate lover and a diplomatic son might find in his father a relative more open to conviction.

It was impossible to abandon Marthe. But impossible, too, at twenty, to meet his parents on the New York dock with the simple statement that he was going back to Paris, as soon as he got his discharge, to live with her. Impossible, meeting his father's shrewd eyes and his mother's adoring smile, to invent any other plausible pretext for his return. Impossible, above all, to conceive of any plan by which Marthe might be fitted into the domestic picture at home. Tied hand and foot he was by the ludicrous inadequacy of youth. Full of fine phrases as he paced the troop ship's deck, but knowing, in his heart of hearts, that he would fail in the ordeal before him. Even in mid-ocean he had only to recall the competent gesture with which his father dismissed domestic controversy with an Olympian twinkle and a wave of an excellent cigar, to know that, mute and miserable, he'd have no argument to offer. That he wouldn't even have the nerve to say he wouldn't go back to Princeton to get his degree.

The Statue of Liberty was waving him back to parental bondage when the blessed idea of temporizing occurred to him. Michael brightened perceptibly at the thought that it was, at the worst, only a question of marking time. He'd graduate next spring. Then he'd be twenty-one. It was heartening to dis-

cover, with Hoboken but half an hour away, so good a reason for postponing the awful hour of revelation.

He said nothing on the dock to mar the joy of his home-coming. And, in the days that followed, he was really shocked at the facility he displayed, under the fond fire of interrogation from friends and family, in hiding the real events of the winter. The depths of his duplicity appalled him, and, facing parental love and pride and confidence, he felt profoundly troubled. Miserably torn between conflicting loyalties. Smirched less by the fact of his adventure than by the necessity for concealing it. Loath to admit, even to himself, the possession of a guilty secret.

Nevertheless, he spent the summer doggedly planning for an ultimate reunion. He wrote Marthe constantly, sent her the bulk of his boyish allowance, tried to keep her in touch with his everyday experience. He wondered, a little helplessly, what she made of those letters, artless accounts of house parties and golf tournaments and country club dances.

She wrote him, too. Brief tender assurance of her love. Thanks for his thought and care. Little descriptions of their personal Paris, changing with post-war conditions. But always without reference to his life at home. And the gulf between them grew wider with the passing months.

Princeton did nothing to bridge it, though he hoped it would. Away from his parents and his childhood companions he had thought that he would feel him-

self again a man. On his own he was, of course, on the campus, but, somehow, in spite of himself, still a child.

His friends, his lectures, the excitements of a New York week-end, the thrills of the football season, were his interests and his preoccupations. He couldn't explain them to Marthe, and he came gradually to think of her less often than in the comparative leisure of his life at home. The first time that she ceased to exist for him, in even the remotest corner of his consciousness, was the glorious half-hour when he stood shouting for the touchdowns of the Tiger in the Princeton cheering section of the Yale Bowl.

A disturbing sense of disloyalty marked his appreciation of the triviality of the incident that could displace her memory. But he felt curiously refreshed by a burst of spontaneous emotion that had no reference to her lovely little image. His mind was black and blue from the pressure of the perplexities that the thought of her engendered. It was almost a relief to find her slipping, ever so imperceptibly, out of his immediate consciousness.

In the throes of his midyears he sent her a money order without even a note. He dropped in at the post-office between two examinations to get it off promptly on the receipt of his February allowance. He realized the enormity of that lapse soon after and was awfully ashamed of it. He wrote ruefully to explain how hard he had been working on Major Math. She never

reproached him, but her letters grew briefer, less vivid. In the spring, suddenly, without warning, they ceased.

He wrote eagerly, anxiously, but he received no answer. And after a perplexed interval of silence he dropped a line of inquiry to the concierge on the Rue des Saints-Pères.

The old boy took an unconscionable length of time to answer. Michael was worried now, frankly worried. Why, anything might have happened! Marthe dominated his thoughts again completely. The baseball season slipped on to its climax without diverting his attention. His senior finals loomed large on his horizon before the letter from Paris arrived.

He was sitting on his window-seat, surrounded by notebooks, when the thin-papered envelope with the French stamp was slipped under his door. He sprang up to open it in a tumult of emotion, hoping against hope, until he saw the scrawling superscription, that it was from Marthe herself. The ill-spelled note was distinguished only by laconic brevity. Madame had left her room in the best of health, leaving no address. She had taken her trunk. And the bill was paid.

Michael sank down upon his window-seat and stared incredulously at the blotted paper. It disposed of any assuaging theory of accident or illness. It told the whole story. She just — hadn't waited.

The gentle June breeze played fitfully in the ivy that framed his window. It carried vaguely to his

ears the laughing voices of a group of sophomores who were gamboling across the campus on pleasure bent. A breath of blooming lilac from the shrubbery below was wafted into the room. It horribly recalled Saint-Cloud. A thousand memories of her face, her voice, her figure, rose up to overwhelm him. With a great sob Michael flung himself face downward among his scattered notebooks and wept wildly, brokenly, like the child he was. Wept for the flight of rapture that could not be recalled. The man that he became was never able to disparage those tears.

At first he felt he'd never love again. And then, of course, he came to know he would. But not that way. That was the pity of it. Was the luster that hung over that early experience but the glamour of youth itself, or was it inherent in the personal magic that little wistful, disillusioned Marthe had cast about him? If she had waited, if he had returned, could he ever have recaptured that early ecstasy?

That was the question that, dazzled by the radiance of the time he had outlived, Michael was never able to face squarely enough to answer. At any rate, she remained for him the tenderest, the most intriguing, of memories. Fantastically an ideal. The object of a romantic loyalty down the years.

The feeling that he had had for her became a touchstone by which to test all subsequent emotion. The facile temptations of early manhood seemed second-rate, not worth succumbing to, in comparison

with the idyllic romance of his youth. That romance that had come before its time, that had felt so supremely right and had been so strangely wrong. The Fates *were* blind, or curiously devoid of pity, that could put into the eager hands of the child he'd been a skein of life that was so perversely tangled.

Well — such as it was, he had done his best to unravel it. He had woven it, every twisted strand and little silken snarl, into the warp and woof of experience long before he'd met Barbara. Really met her, that is. Noticed her. Known her for anything but the little girl, who, long after he was recognized as a social factor in an adult world, still painted paper dolls with his kid sisters and climbed the apple trees in the side yard in a flutter of golden curls and wind-blown petticoats.

Michael was a bit blasé when Barbara came home from boarding-school. Bored with the easy entanglements of the young matrons' tea-tables and rather inclined to feel, with the disillusion of his twenty-nine summers, that he'd known the girls he knew too long for much enchantment. Barbara was distinctly a shock. Child as she was of a deprived generation that could no longer let down its skirts and put up its hair as a proof of maturity, she had her own ingenious methods of reminding him that, in spite of her abbreviated pleats and close-clipped bob, she was now something to be reckoned with.

And reckoning with Barbara proved to be such fun!

She entered his life with a little commanding gesture of authority from the very moment that he glimpsed her standing provocatively on its threshold. There was really no resisting Barbara. And no one encouraged him to resist her. Every one was all on his side. It was so eminently suitable. Every one but Barbara. *She* met his admiring gaze with an enigmatic twinkle that seemed to deny the possibility of capture at the very moment that it acknowledged the inevitability of pursuit. Of course he learned later that he was mistaken about that.

'I marked you down, Micky,' boasted Barbara gayly, 'from the moment I laid eyes on you! You didn't have a chance, old dear, from the word "go." I knew it was all over but the shouting before you fired the first gun. Men have no guile.'

Men *had* no guile, reflected Michael ruefully, as he tried to phrase a pretext for escaping Paris. There must be one, lurking somewhere, if he could only find it. But his wedding day was upon him before he ran it down.

He saw it dawn with no pronounced misgiving. Confronted with Barbara's tender, tangible presence, the little wistful ghost that walked the corridors of memory seemed strangely vague and visionary. It had no place in the sweet and silly ceremony of the wedding. In the foolish, formal fluster over ushers' neckties and bridesmaids' bouquets. It paled before the tulle-clad vision of a strangely chastened Barbara,

standing at his side under a bell of smilax, presenting a cool young cheek to the conventional salutation of their little world. It shrank before the uproarious horde of young men in cutaways, who threatened him obscurely from distant corners with fistfuls of rice and bows of satin ribbon, and escorted the bride, with Princeton cheers and bursts of popular melody, to cut the monumental cake, romantically enough — the idea had been Barbara's — with his veteran sword.

It faded then. But there were moments to come when it was to rise before him with appalling clarity. Moments when it stood beside the fresh, confiding figure of his young wife, raising more poignantly than ever before the obstinate questionings of his perplexed heart.

Their blue days at sea, to be sure, formed a week of enchantment. But once landed in England the dread of Paris bobbed up again disquietingly. He couldn't keep from thinking of it. Of what had happened there. This wasn't quite the same. He couldn't make it so. Was it just that he was older? Had it ever been as he now remembered it? And was that little spectral presence to haunt his life forever with the disturbing thought of opportunities not taken, possibilities not realized?

Striding with Barbara on the Devon downs, motoring with her through the hills of Wales, lingering before the glittering London shop fronts, planning the

spending of their wedding checks in the hilarious intimacy of a single umbrella, he did his best to keep the little ghost at bay. It followed him, of course, but at a respectful distance, at least in daylit hours. But this was England. Surely in Paris, turning the corner of some busy boulevard, looking up the curving vista of an old gray street, he'd meet his little spectre face to face. Not in the flesh, of course, but in the more disturbing medium of the spirit. He'd stand aghast, he knew, until it vanished, leaving him miserably alone, in spite of Barbara, in a dreary Paris no longer transfigured by the fugitive glory of his early dream.

He took the Channel boat with mute foreboding. The first familiar accents of the French language, caught on the lips of a Calais porter, fell like a knell on his expectant ear. The toot of the trumpet that dispatched the Paris express overwhelmed him with a sudden, surging memory of the parting in the Gare Saint-Lazare. Well, he was in for it now. Six days, after all, was all they'd have there. Enough, however, reflected Michael ruefully, for God to have created heaven and earth, and probably sufficient to send his little universe, painfully constructed through years of vain regret and assuaging philosophy, tumbling about his ears.

Breakfasting with Barbara next morning on the balcony of their hotel bedroom, lingering over his café complêt and watching her spread, with childlike enthusiasm, the pale translucent honey on her third

French roll, Michael dismally realized that it was all going to be quite as dreadful as he had ever imagined it.

'Isn't it fun, darling?' said Barbara gleefully, delicately licking a honey drop from her little pink palm. 'And isn't it foreign?' Regardless of fluttering bridal négligée, she hung blissfully over the balcony rail. 'I can't wait to get down on the streets. I want to stroll on the boulevards and rub elbows with the demi-mondaines. I want to buy everything I see. I want to spend a lot of money all morning long. And then I want you to set me up to a perfect lunch at some smart restaurant. Later we'll take a taxi. I'm going to put in the afternoon, old dear, investigating your past. I want to see where you worked and where you ate and where you lived. We're going to have a time, Micky. I feel just like the blonde preferred by gentlemen, "London is nothing."'

London *was* nothing, Michael saw clearly, compared to the ordeal that was before him. But he got through the morning rather better than he expected. The Rue de la Paix was not at all reminiscent. They bought a diamond wrist watch there with Aunt Maria's check, and then strolled down the Rue Saint-Honoré to Lanvin's to order some gowns. It was fun to watch Barbara expanding in acquisitive ecstasies, but he found the meretricious glitter of that paradise of purchase a bit appalling.

Moreover, the beguiling ladies, met in profusion in

the shops and on the pavements, intrigued him less than they did his wide-eyed bride. He discreetly expressed no opinion on their invincible virtue, but he disappointed Barbara profoundly by confessing mildly to doubts of their irresistible charm. The soft, dark glances that met his own in brief appraisal from under their tiny hat brims held a warning gleam of calculation, and he claimed that the ingenuous American tourists, swarming everywhere, pleased him better. That the stout lady from Omaha, spending money like a drunken sailor, who picked him up at Lanvin's to exchange a sympathetic word on the deplorable customs of their country, was more his kind.

He saw himself fall in Barbara's estimation on that humble assertion. He was really mortified when she turned from a jeweler's window to find him standing on the curbstone, ignoring the brilliant parade of feminine fashion, to watch, with a little grin of affection, the Cook's Tour of middle-aged school teachers, who were gaping with awful reverence from the very doorsill of Coty's perfume shop, at the Colonne Vendôme.

'Micky,' said Barbara, as she slipped her arm through his, 'you're invincibly respectable. It's a great disappointment. I came to Paris to see life.'

Lingering over the perfect lunch in the smart, sophisticated restaurant, attended by hovering waiters and fortified by Michael's admiring smile, Barbara

was serenely convinced that she really was. The room was a brilliant chaos of movement, noise, and color. The staccato rattle of French voices dominated the crash of orchestral jazz that rose from the palms near the door. The air was heavy with the smell of perfect food and fading hothouse flowers.

'I won't believe, Micky,' she said happily, 'that it's not all as wicked as it's wonderful.'

Her blue eyes danced with pleasure as she surveyed the scene before her. The light dresses of women. The sleek dark heads of men. The drooping shoulders of the mutually engrossed couples that filled the roselit tables. The infinite, glittering detail of fashion. The wicked little hats, large jewels, brilliant flowers, the soft enhancing furs. The lovely insolent faces of the ladies. The arrogant carmine of their lips. The violent splendor of their eyes.

'Why can't I look like that, Micky?' she queried anxiously. 'As if nothing were good enough for me? As if you'd have to make the grade on high, if I came for the ride?'

'I'm glad you don't,' he said, gravely. But she ignored him.

'They *are* so chic,' she murmured, wistfully.

'They look like painted idols.'

'That's rather nice, Micky.' Her eyes were still upon them. 'On alien altars.'

'"The heathen in his ignorance,"' he quoted briefly.

'I know, Micky' — her glance met his with a little beam of understanding. 'With queer prayers and prostrations. Still, I don't blame him. They're lovely.'

They were, of course. But not his kind, and never could be. His kind was Barbara. Unless it was that softer, subtler something he had known in Marthe. Not these false goddesses, at any rate, hung with the tangible tributes of man's disdainful devotion.

Barbara was smiling at him over her empty demitasse. A nimble waiter was hovering behind her chair.

'That was lovely, Micky,' she was saying happily. 'And now for your checkered past. Call me that taxi, old top.'

Whirling with Barbara through the sunlit splendor of the Place Vendôme, turning into the brilliant confusion of the Rue de Rivoli, Michael was conscious of a last despairing struggle with besieging memory. By the time they had reached the formal gray façade of the old S.O.S. headquarters, he'd lost the unequal fight. He gazed in silence at the familiar archway, through which he'd swung so many radiant evenings, with youth and happiness winging his careless feet. At the tall shuttered window, behind its iron railing, from which, over dreary columns of figures and boring bills of lading, he'd stared so often in enchanted reverie. The dreams he'd dreamed, the visions he'd seen there, rose again to meet him. It seemed uncanny that the tranquil blue eyes of Barbara could

smile into his own so mercifully unconscious of the obstinate little ghost that stood against the crumbling walls of the inner courtyard, like some dim fresco on the worn gray stone.

As they crossed the Seine he felt it was the Rubicon. The Isle de Saint-Louis glimmered in the sun-shot air. The boat for Saint-Cloud was waiting at its dock. Beyond the bridge the little twisted streets of memory led on to his lost paradise. The Rue des Saints-Pères was utterly unchanged. The old gray house, the little cobbled court were just the same. Only a different concierge, a fat friendly woman, in a worn black shawl, answered Barbara's salutation with a kindly smile. The room was let, thank God.

From that moment Michael lost all courage, abandoned every effort to exorcise his little willful wraith. He saw all Paris through the ghostly transparency of that small expectant figure. It knew no rules. It never vanished at the conventional cock-crow, but it always crept closer with the falling dusk. In the reminiscent intimacy of a little restaurant he saw Marthe's eyes upon him in the lamplight. In the protecting privacy of a darkened taxi he felt her slender figure press gently against his encircling arm.

It was Paris, of course. It was only Paris. His nerves were getting jumpy. He knew that. But, in spite of himself, his mind returned to that buried problem of what had really happened. She must be

— somewhere. Possibly close at hand. He might meet her in the street, at any moment. The flitting figure of a passing shopgirl could send his heart into his throat in broadest daylight. A lonely little drab, hovering at dusk about a café entrance, could overwhelm him with a sudden fear. He found himself staring, with a dreadful dread of recognition, into the pale or painted faces of the shabby little shadows of the nocturnal boulevards. And he thought he saw her once, at midnight, fluttering on the arm of a drunken tourist, in the brilliant yellow radiance of the entrance of the Moulin Rouge.

He realized, a moment later, from the dusk of the pavement, that the dismal little moth in flimsy finery was nothing like her. Had only youth and poverty in common with the girl he feared to find. He felt himself trembling, actually trembling with the relief of that realization, and, a little later, in the protective shadow of their home-bound taxi, he felt for one weak moment that, really, he must tell Barbara, that the strain of merciful concealment could no longer be endured. He never knew whether courage or cowardice kept him from that shattering revelation. Perhaps it was only the warning memory of that poignant moment at the dawn of their engagement, when he had embarked on a faltering confession to Barbara under the flowering apple trees in the side yard at home.

'No — don't tell me, Micky,' she had said very

quickly. 'I'm afraid it's sordid. And it's all behind you. I don't want to know it.'

Her brave blue eyes had looked with tremulous confidence into his own. With confidence, but what misunderstanding! Sordid, above all things, was just what it wasn't. And — behind him? Instinctively Michael had known that just what Barbara supremely wouldn't want to know was what he had to tell. The strength of his feeling for Marthe, the faith he'd kept with her memory down the years.

So that evening, mute with the misery he longed to make articulate, he sat beside her in the rattling taxi, finding comfort in the fact that to-morrow would be their last day in Paris. Eventually even this hideous week would take its place with all disturbing memories. The hand of time would blur its painful outlines. He'd learn to live with it, discipline it, bury it deep under the trivial, demanding detail of everyday life at home.

The next day, mercifully, was very busy. It dawned on a preoccupied and practical Barbara, full of frantic, festive plans for last errands to be done, last sights to be seen. She was already dedicated to a final orgiastic hour at Lanvin's.

'Come with me, Micky,' she said coaxingly. 'I want to show you my gowns. They're too enchanting. We'll stop on the way to the banker's, so it will save you time.'

Laughing at the logic of that last specious state-

ment, Michael followed her indulgently. It was a busy day for the *modistes*, a friendly *vendeuse* explained on their arrival. Three large liners were sailing to-morrow, the fitting-rooms were full of anxious Americans, and, at the moment, the reception salon was occupied by a Parisian customer.

'Une de nos meilleures clientes,' murmured the *vendeuse* in tacit apology, as she motioned Barbara to a bench in the entrance corridor. Michael, standing at her elbow, surveyed the frantic feminine confusion with an indulgent smile. His *was* the superior sex, he reflected, with a thought for the tomblike austerity, the impressive silence of the establishment of his London tailor.

Here fitters ran to and fro, holding diaphanous draperies and stiff cambric linings. Anxious tourists thrust worried faces around half-opened doors. Voluble *vendeuses* turned flattering smiles on nervous customers and harassed frowns on the imperturbable mannequins that constantly passed, like lovely aloof angels, heavenly visitants from some tranquil paradise, graceful and unhurried, with incredible perfection of line and movement, across the frantic scene. The air rang with vociferous Gallic cries.

'Ernestine! Ernestine! Faites descendre la doublure de madame! Madeleine! Madeleine! La bleu, s'il vous plaît! Et vite, vite, vite! Nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre!'

But beyond the arched doorway leading to the

reception salon, quiet reigned supreme. There the *vendeuses* seemed stricken to a respectful silence, and even the lofty mannequins, assuming a faintly deferential air in crossing the threshold, startlingly betrayed a disarming desire to please. Michael and Barbara peeped curiously into the room.

The seated figure of a woman, distinguished by elegance of line and costume, was silhouetted against the sunshine of the long French windows. Her head was inclined in a graceful attitude of grave attention. Her gaze was fixed on an armful of soft, silken fabrics that an obsequious *vendeuse* was holding for her consideration under a golden lamp. Another, at her elbow, stood gently shaking a luxurious pelt of silver fox in the summer sun. In the center of the room the mannequin of the moment, arrested by an imperious preoccupied gesture, stood motionless on tiptoe, with arms outstretched and chin held high, a figure turned to stone.

The woman turned from the silks to scrutinize her dispassionately. Even Michael, twinkling in the gloom of the corridor, was conscious of the suspense of the moment. It was really breathless. The final word was about to be made articulate. Here was an infallible critic, contemplating with desolating detachment, a work of art.

'C'est très bien,' she said. And the tension snapped. The *vendeuses* moved and murmured in relieved acquiescence. The mannequin returned to life.

'Isn't she stupendous?' breathed Barbara admiringly.

The friendly *vendeuse* brushed busily by them.

'Toute de suite, madame,' she smiled reassuringly.

Barbara caught her arm.

'Who is that French woman?' she asked. 'She looks so distinguished.'

'Ah, c'est un personnage important!' The voice of the *vendeuse* dropped to a discreet undertone. 'C'est la maîtresse de Baron Bernstein. The champagne baron. We design for her exclusively. It is a great privilege.'

'His *mistress*?' echoed Barbara. But the *vendeuse* had left them. 'Micky, isn't that incredible? Why, she's simply entrancing. She looks like a million dollars! How *do* they do it?'

'God knows,' said Michael soberly. 'I'm glad you don't.'

'Micky, don't be silly! Why she *looks* like an angel. And so — so secure. Can you see her face, Micky? Does she look happy?'

'I don't want to see it,' said Michael stoutly. 'I'm a bit fed up with these frogs.' Then, irrelevantly, 'Your nose is still freckled from the sun in Cornwall. Don't powder it, Babs! Please don't — for me.'

'Maintenant, madame,' cried the *vendeuse* commandingly.

Barbara turned toward the fitting-room.

'I'll call you, Micky. I won't be a moment.' As

she vanished from his sight the woman in the salon rose from her chair.

'Alors en velours rose,' she said. The *vendeuse* bowed in acquiescence.

'Diamanté, madame?'

'Je pense que oui.' She stood silent a moment to consider this vital problem. Then with finality. 'Oui, sur la ceinture.' And moved toward the door.

Michael turned hastily to hide his smile. The fate of nations might have hung on her decision. Perhaps her own fate did. Her baron might be difficult. Looking at her, however, it was hard to credit that. Doubtless his scalp would hang securely from that little spangled girdle of pink velvet. What fools — these Frenchmen!

The woman advanced with graceful authority of movement. She was really something out of the ordinary. There was nothing theatric about her. On the contrary. But she was far from ingenuous. There was a subtle sophistication in her extreme simplicity of manner and in the modish austerity of her dress. Her very artlessness was a triumph of artifice. Michael discreetly averted his gaze. Suddenly he was conscious that she had paused, had faltered, had looked up into his face.

'Michel!' she said. And the voice tore suddenly at his heartstrings.

It was she. It was Marthe. She stood transfixed before him, her slender gloved hands clasped upon her

breast. Her great dark eyes looked incredulously up at him from her lovely, loveless face.

'Michel!' she said again. And her impassive features were suddenly illumined with a flame of feeling. They stood, an instant, speechless, staring into each other's eyes. The voice of Barbara from the fitting-room beyond crashed in on their mutual absorption.

'Micky!' she called gayly. 'I'm ready. Come and see me.'

The great dark eyes widened in mute interrogation.

'My — my wife,' said Michael lamely. 'I've just been married.'

The light in her countenance was suddenly extinguished.

'Oh,' she said coldly, almost harshly. And again, 'Oh!'

He took a step toward her.

'Marthe,' he said, 'it's — it's great to see you.'

'Vraiment, Michel?' she asked. 'At the moment?' Her carmined lips curved softly to a smile. A smile he'd never known. Even her eyes were different, twinkling ironically under the strange new arch of her delicately penciled brows.

'Marthe — you are very — changed.'

Her hands made a little Gallic gesture of self-appraisal.

'You see me as I am,' she said.

Slender and silken and seductive she stood before him, paler than her pendant pearls in the écru drapery

of her perfect gown. Her diamond bangles sparkled at her wrists. Her eyes looked fearlessly into his own. She was marvelous — triumphant. Yet ——

'Marthe,' he said brokenly, 'Marthe, I'm sorry.'

For an instant only her composure was shaken.

'Pourquoi, Michel? I am what life has made me.' Her voice grew steadier as she spoke. She was carrying it all off wonderfully. 'Don't look so tragic,' she added lightly. 'In my way I'm a masterpiece.'

She was. But something infinitely foreign to himself. Appallingly remote from the things he loved and knew and recognized as his own. There was really nothing to say. Michael didn't try to say it.

'Micky!' called Barbara again. 'Come here! I want you.'

Marthe turned from him abruptly. He felt strangely unmoved. At the door she paused to look back with a lovely little gesture of farewell.

'Adieu,' she said. The smile was ironic, but her lips were tremulous. As she vanished over the threshold, Michael felt his eyes fill suddenly with tears. Something was dead in him. He stood beside its grave.

'Micky!' called Barbara.

The door to the fitting-room swung open on a reassuring vision. The friendly *vendeuse* was beckoning on the threshold. Two fitters crouched devotionally on their knees. The morning sun poured in on the little dais, where, framed in the crystal planes of a triple mirror, Barbara stood, straight and slim and

boyish, in the crisp white folds of a taffeta evening gown. The blue ribbon of her girdle matched the color in her candid eyes. The knot of rosebuds at her shoulder deepened the flush on her rounded cheeks. Her thin young arms hung awkwardly down upon her silvery flounces. Above the straight white bodice a square of summer tan marred the childlike purity of her neck and throat. Her little freckled nose was wrinkled with her inquiring smile.

'Do you like me?' she asked artlessly.

A flood of relief rushed over Michael. The uncertainty of the years was swept away. *This* was what he wanted! Why had he ever doubted it? This, thank God, was what he had!

'I love you,' he said impetuously. 'Babs, I *do* love you!'

Ignoring the smiling Frenchwomen, she laughed happily back at him.

'I know you do, Micky,' she said contentedly, and turned again to the mirror.

Michael could not tear his eyes from the reassuring vision. He knew it, too, at last.

PERPETUAL CARE

PERPETUAL CARE

KATE DALTON came slowly down her elliptical staircase, her slender hand clasping, just a little too carefully for comfort, the delicate iron rail. It was lovely, of course, to look at, but how disconcerting to have a staircase that always made you remember that you were fifty-nine. Sooner or later she would certainly slip on those triangular treads. Slip ignominiously down at the feet of her own butler, standing with deferential dignity on the black-and-white tiles below. What would Sands do about it, she wondered, when that day came? Would he lapse, even momentarily, from the perfect manservant as he scrambled her to her feet? Appalling, really, to be fifty-nine! Sixty in April. Appalling to fumble, be it ever so little on any staircase! Reassuring to hear her still shapely, high-heeled slippers tap briskly, competently, on the marble floor.

Kate paused for a moment in the doorway to cast a capable glance into her little paneled dressing-room, and caught her reflection in the mirror beyond. Yes, on the level at least, in the proper light and with the correct setting, she did not look her years. Not even in her mourning, now that she had abandoned the melodramatic absurdity of that widow's veil. Ridiculous, mourning. Fancy dress, it always seemed to her. What had two yards of crisp black crêpe, drag-

ging her hat back and giving her a headache, to do with the curiously disproportionate sense of desolation that Sam's death had brought into her life. But she had never dared to say that even to the boys, let alone to Katherine — Katherine, whose grief for her father seemed somehow all expended in the sacred significance of the width of a grosgrain ribbon, the decent distinction between a suède and a shiny black kid glove.

Even Lily, to whom as a daughter-in-law (Lily had still been a daughter-in-law two years ago when Sam had died) had been entrusted the solemn office of buying the family funeral weeds, even Lily, light, laughing Lily, had accepted the doleful duty as a very serious affair. Kate could hear her now, insisting that a becoming white crêpe frill was quite correct for a widow and arguing with Katherine as to whether a daughter-in-law could wear the thinnest weight of black chiffon stockings, lugubrious phrase, 'at first.'

'Not for six weeks!' Katherine had declared with firmness, and had carried her point. Katherine always carried her point. But, then, to be sure, she was usually right. Just like Sam in that. Probably Lily's frivolous little legs in sheerest chiffon *wouldn't* have been quite the thing in the family lot at Graceland. Or even walking up the aisle of the Presbyterian Church behind all those honorary pall-bearers — presidents of all the best banks and a United States

Senator and three corporation lawyers of really international distinction!

Sam, of course, *would* have approved his own funeral. That was the only thought that had sustained Kate in the dismal pageant in which she was incredibly required to play the first feminine rôle. Dear simple-hearted Sammy! Wasn't one of the most appealing, most lovable, things about him the fact that to the last he had never lost his childlike faith that pageantry mattered profoundly, that all that glittered *was* gold? Kate was recalled to herself by the discreet shuffle of her butler's feet. She looked capably about the gray-green grandeur of her Georgian entrance.

'Sands,' she said competently, 'that filet door curtain will have to be cleaned again before we go South. See that Jennie puts up the new one before the party to-night. Tell the cook to have sandwiches with the cocktails — those little hot things she does with tuna fish. Caviare at table would make us late for the opera. We'll be six at dinner.'

'Yes, madam,' said Sands, his hand on the door-knob.

'And, Sands, if there's no more Italian vermouth you can make us whiskey sours. I'll be home quite early. I'm just stepping out to the doctor's. Tell Miss Brice where I've gone in case there should be any important message. But you needn't mention it to Mr. Bob or Mr. Christopher, if they should inquire.'

The children were all so silly, making that foolish little question of her foolish little pain, once she'd mentioned it to Katherine, a matter for solemn family conclave. They'd been at her for months to go to see a doctor. She owed it to her personal pride not to tell them she'd gone.

'Yes, madam,' said Sands once more, throwing open the door to the wintry sunshine of the crisp January afternoon. Kate was conscious of a slight tremor in his impassive countenance, that faintly personal glint in his eye that she sometimes thought betrayed a humanly affectionate concern for her welfare. The betrayal of any human emotion, when on duty, Kate knew Sands could only consider a weakness.

But, 'Madam,' he was incredibly volunteering, 'the steps are very icy.' And that was Sands's hand under her elbow, and he was unbelievably steering her down her slippery path toward her motor, just as if she were a very old lady. She braced herself to pull away from him with rebuking independence, but her heels were high, and the path *was* icy, and here came the pain again, very inopportunely, so that she could only clutch him for a moment, quite breathlessly, until it passed.

Benton, standing motionless beside the open door of the limousine, seemed somehow to catch and reflect Sands's absurdly anxious expression as she passed him by and sank, relieved, on the soft whipcord cushions

of the motor. She *was* old or ill or something queer if two such good servants as Sands and Benton would permit themselves to exchange a concerned and understanding glance over her diminished head. She gave the doctor's address with dignity, as Benton, once more the perfect automaton, wrapped the brown beaver rug about her knees.

Funny, this pain. She'd felt it more than a year now. But not often, until just lately. She'd felt so run down all fall. So tired. And of course, though she wouldn't have confessed it to Katherine for worlds, she *had* taken Bob's divorce awfully hard. Curious, you thought you were so free a spirit until one of your own children ran amuck and then you realized that, for them, at least, you passionately desired only the most conventional security. Any compromise that would keep them safe. Peace, without victory.

Your own life was different. Taking chances, now and then — that had been the fun of it. It was only being foolish, after all, that taught you that complete recovery from any act of folly was always possible. You learned by your mistakes. You learned a lot, to understand yourself and others. Not to judge — ever. What *didn't* you come to understand by looking back steadfastly down the years on those few moments when you, yourself, had been divinely a fool. But *you* had common sense, and, after all, your life, as you reviewed it at fifty-nine, what did it matter? One silly

little life? Your children's lives? That was different, somehow. They were children. They were much too precious to be trusted with themselves.

Bob had behaved badly, very badly. She would never blame Lily. Though she had hated the marriage at first. Bob just back from France and the war that had redeemed him, after having been twice dropped and finally irrevocably sent home from Yale. Just twenty-four years old and earning just that many dollars a week on a high stool in his father's bank. And Lily, silly little Lily, unfortunate child of the war-spoiled generation, only nineteen years old, undereducated, overdressed, looking back on a brief thrilling past of war-time emotion, looking forward to a future of which she impossibly demanded only a continuation of the emotion and the thrill.

She had felt this *couldn't* be going to happen to Bob, not just when he had returned to her, no longer the proverbial problem that he had been since his first school day, but, incredibly, a hero, self-assured and reassuring, with his citation from Château-Thierry for 'conspicuous bravery under fire'! Why, pacifist at heart that she was, she had found herself shamelessly thinking that the World War had not been fought in vain if it had redeemed her Bobby.

Well, she had learned her lesson. Good *couldn't* come out of evil. Not in the long run. Meeting death — that was comparatively easy. Didn't we all come to it, sooner or later? No preparation at all — that

stimulating adventure — for the drearier, if more subtle, ordeal of meeting life. It was the rendezvous with life that the young hero poets should stress. Life was the adversary to fear. It played a waiting game. One way or another didn't it always get you in the end?

Bob had been glorious in the French trenches. She'd never forget it and she hoped the world wouldn't. But in the Chicago night clubs — well, it had been just the same old story. And if Lily hadn't helped, silly, little, laughing Lily, she hadn't really hindered. She'd had Robbie, the first grandchild, and if, sometimes a little drunk, but never really disorderly, in the manner of her reckless generation, she had danced the marriage down to destruction, hadn't it always been following Bob's lead? Strange how she'd learned to love Lily, just when they were about to lose her.

Children-in-law, she supposed, were always something to take with a certain philosophy. No use worrying about them. Accept them, without futile complaint, like the weather. What, now, had Katherine seen in Charles, whose solid worth, in its way, had been just as great a blow to maternal solicitude as the lightness of Lily! Sam, though, had always liked Charles. Had thoroughly approved *that* marriage. Thought him sound. Thought him sane. Sam had always instinctively picked his friends, as he had his investments, with an almost subconscious flair for

those that would never fail him. And Charles, certainly, had never failed any one. He'd been a real son to Sammy and wonderful, always, about Bob. A good husband. A good father. If she and Christopher had perversely thought him just a little too sound, that was their affair. What was it Christopher had profanely remarked — and just when Charles was being so sensible, if a little sententious, about Bob's divorce — 'I prefer my gold plated. The solid variety is too heavy for domestic use!'

Darling Christopher! Provocative Christopher! The only one of her children, who, in a solemn moment, could be counted on to say something charmingly frivolous and funny. The light touch — supreme gift of a fairy godmother — what a weapon that was for gallant young Christopher in the unequal combat with life! But was it really? The fact that he could laugh a little, lightly, at Cora Curtis, call her 'The Youth's Companion,' mock, so disarmingly, in the sanctity of his mother's dressing-room, the seven telling years that stretched between them and the intriguing tilt of her little silvery head, didn't at all prevent him from falling a victim to her widow's wiles. For Christopher was quite definitely, quite seriously, and, oh, so lamentably, falling. Not a weapon, at all, the light touch, really. Rather a smoke screen, a shield, behind which you hid in the thick of battle, so that the bewildered non-combatant at your elbow never *was* really sure what the shooting was for.

The motor was turning into the side street, grinding slowly through the crumpled snowdrifts toward the curb before the doctor's door. Chicago snow, yellow and gray and grimy, shoveled by the street sweepers into ungainly heaps on the barren grass plots, soiled with smoke, spotted with soot. Hideous, really, a Chicago winter. Save on those rare days when you stepped out of your door and caught a brand-new snowstorm unaware, great fluffy flakes, floating casually down on street and tree and iron railing, frosting the tops of the limousines and delivery wagons with wet, white icing, bending the bushes in the park under the soft, ponderous burden of the snow. Lovely then — but only for an hour.

Land breezes, too, in early spring, they were nice, blowing the ice flow out into the lake, making and breaking great streaks of blue between the icy islands. But these were fleeting interludes. Otherwise, hideous, really. Yet better than Miami, where she would so soon have to be, opening that absurd Italian villa, all pink plaster and cluttered tile, outlined against a stagey back drop of sand and sea and sky, with those spectacular clusters of palm trees adding the last touch of unreality to the picture. Palms *were* trees, she had to admit, like New England elms and pines, but they always *did* look, as Christopher said, 'false as hell,' suggesting only park green houses and hotel lobbies and altars at church weddings and parlors at house funerals.

Funny to think that the one place she'd like to go to see the winter out was that Vermont village where she'd lived as a girl. Why, she hadn't even seen it in snow time for over thirty years. Bob was a baby when she and Sam had come West. But she could so distinctly recall the little spotless scene of snow and sunshine, glittering beneath the great inverted bowl of stainless sky. The sweep of pine-clad hill above the town. The great crusted curves of the mammoth snowdrifts, burying, here and there, the low stone walls that criss-crossed the rocky pastures. The skeletons of the elm trees on the village street, their bare, drooping boughs dominating the rows of white New England houses that stood, tightly barricaded by storm door and window against the weather, looking just a little gray and dingy, the best of them, against the dazzling background of immaculate snow.

The motor had stopped. Benton was throwing open the door. Funny, as she untangled her feet from the coils of the brown beaver rug, she could just imagine that she and Sam and Bobby were driving up Main Street, in the little black cutter, to her father's house for Sunday tea. She could positively feel the straw under her feet, prickly about her ankles, and smell the pungent odor of the old gray horse blanket around her knees, and hear the jingle of the sleighbells in the winter breeze. See Sam in his old coonskin cap and Bobby in that little red hood she'd knitted for him his second winter. So red their cheeks. So white their

breath in the frosty air! Good gracious! Benton was again looking anxious! She rose and said evenly:

'Wait, Benton. I'll not be long. Not more than twenty minutes.'

How long *had* she been, she wondered, on her return, as she stepped dumbly into the motor. How long did it take to change the world completely? To turn one's glance, trying, oh, ever so hard, to keep it even and unafraid, from life to death? Had she known it before she went into the doctor's office? Inevitably known it all those months, when she hadn't told the children about that little pain? Known it, above all, when she *had*, and had read for just one moment, before it was wiped out by the throes of family discussion, a panic fear in their concerned young eyes?

The doctor had hated to tell her. But she'd made him. Hadn't had to make him, really, for, of course, as soon as she'd recognized that reluctance, that hanging back from explicit diagnosis, she'd understood. But she'd got it all out of him. So easily, too, with just a few words about large responsibilities and meeting the future and business arrangements necessary for the head of a family. Even doctors, juggling with life and death, bowed to business arrangements. On the threshold of eternity Sam's millions commanded respect.

She knew that if she'd said she must know for any really important reason, to save her soul, to prepare to meet her God, the doctor would have smiled with

all the bright reassurance of his profession and replied, 'Now, Mrs. Dalton, you're tired out and a little hysterical. There's nothing you need to worry about. A little more rest and you'll see it all quite differently.'

But when she had explained that it was a question of forming a trust for the three grandchildren, he had understood at once that this was not a moment for prevarication or mercy. Before the autumn, he'd said. But they'd keep her from pain. Why, he'd give her something for *that* to-day. No use to worry. Take it easy. No reason at all why she shouldn't go to Florida. Best place for her. He'd give her a letter to a big New York specialist in Miami. He'd come himself, like a shot, if she wired.

Kate had read in his eyes, by this time, a flattering respect for the way she was taking it. Curious to be capable of being flattered at such a moment. Why did it seem so ridiculously, so absurdly, important to play the game? To be calm, to be quiet, to achieve, outwardly at least, a certain practical detachment from all the shock and the horror? Egotism, it was, really, nothing more admirable. That consuming inner urge, that would not be denied, to act the heroine, to be applauded, to play the big scene in the grand manner.

It was like something else she'd known. What was it? Oh, of course! Having the babies. Then again she had felt that intoxicating sense of the stage being supremely hers, of the spotlight beating full upon her. Had known that silly, passionate desire to be thought

wonderful in a crisis. To joke with the doctor. To bring a smile to Sammy's strained, anxious face. A little admirable, after all, to rise superior to the event, to assert the supremacy of the spirit in a world of pain and loss and fear. But creating life, that was thrilling, that was glorious. This was different. Meeting death. Had she, with all her discernment, down the perplexed years of living, somehow underestimated the pangs of that ultimate experience?

Eight months to live. Nine months. Possibly ten. Sensational statement. Words you could listen to, words you could utter. But something, somehow, about yourself, you couldn't possibly believe. Sixty years, almost, behind you and eight brief months ahead. Well, it was only a fact that needed facing, like any other. Belief would come later. Practical action — that was what she must count on to get her through the first hard weeks of realization. Doing the next thing that had to be done. That was what had always pulled her through her worst moments.

And, now, of course, she had to open that house in Miami. Absurd obligation. But no less real for all its absurdity. Bob was counting on her. Bob was going to have little Robbie there, his first six months of little Robbie, after the divorce of last summer. Lily was counting on her too. Counting on her to see it through. Hating to give up her baby. Distrusting Bob. Looking to Kate to manage it all. To look after Robbie. To see fair play. To keep Bob straight

while the child was with him. Horrible, Robbie's position in that broken home. Horrible the position of all the children of divorced parents. Five-year-old Robbie, after his six months with Lily in her gay, lonely little flat, trailing down to Florida, with her and his English nurse, to begin life over again with his father in that pink stucco villa. Trailing back in April to take possession of the brand-new nursery, installed for his benefit in her big town house, only to be snatched up again by Lily on July first for a summer at Biarritz before the lonely little flat engulfed him again. No, she couldn't desert Robbie. She'd have to see Bob through Florida. Next spring, no, she wouldn't think of that. Katherine would take it on, somehow. She and Charles. And Christopher, too, of course. They'd all look after Bob. They'd help with Robbie.

Wonderful, of course, to feel, at fifty-nine, you were so necessary. But hadn't the necessities of these latter years somehow crowded out the pleasures, the satisfactions, the fun? Your children, your grandchildren, they were everything, of course, as you grew older. But still, you, yourself, you did exist as a person. You had your own life. At least you had had, once. Curious to want so much to live it again, just for yourself, at the end.

That Vermont village — strange how it all came back to her. That early life, that previous incarnation, that was so different from the long Middle-

Western years that had followed it. If she could just go back, now, alone, for the children wouldn't understand. Not even Christopher, who understood so much. For Sam's millions had made Christopher, intellectually so austere, a sybarite in living. He liked the fleshpots. But she could go back and stop at the little village hotel with its narrow porch, its white Corinthian columns, rising flush from the sidewalk of Main Street. Yes, sleep coldly on a narrow bed, keep up a wood fire in a Franklin stove, light a kerosene lamp, eat those dreadful New England meals of pie and doughnuts and soggy bread and tough meat and pale coffee. But see the seasons through once more.

Know again the green layers of the pine boughs, heavy with snow, the white contours of the granite hill against the sky. The first warm sun of spring, the melting snow, the roaring brooks, the slush, the mud, the buds, the birds. The first arbutus, with its fibrous stem, its small pink blossom and unearthly fragrance, poking up through the pine needles about the reddish brown roots of the pine trees. The springy feeling underfoot of those woodland trails, the uneven quality of the stony paths across the pastures. Maple trees in tiny festive leaf. Violets by the brook's edge. Apple trees, then, of course, leaning crazily over gray stone walls. Lilacs flanking front doors, unused front doors, green-paneled, with bright brass knockers, or trailing their clustered blossoms over the silver sheen of a weathered woodpile. Then daisies and yellow butter-

cups in the little tip-tilted meadows. Rectangular, walled pastures, brimful of hay. Heat. Ripening apples. Hollyhocks behind picket fences. Goldenrod by the roadside. Trumpet vine twining over the vague dilapidation of shed and outhouse. Bay and sweet fern, redolent in the summer sun. Blueberries on the hilltops.

The hilltops! With a sick surge of realization Kate wondered if, even were she there, she could achieve them in August. Of course it was years since she had climbed them, but it was incredible to feel that she would never again turn from a pasture path into a woodland trail, mount up through flickering sun and shadow to the granite ledges above, feel the purity of the mountain breeze, the exaltation of the height. Look down on the world in every physical and spiritual sense. Then turn and drop down among the bay bushes and forget heroics in the pleasure of eating blueberries. Blueberries as big as your thumb, with the grayish blush of the wind and the rain on them, ripe and sweet and hot in the sun.

Autumn too. You could just look at autumn, from a chair, from a window. You needn't attain the hills. And trees turned first in the lowlands. She could catch the first chill of it if she were lucky. The transforming breath of frost swept over the valleys quite early some Septembers. That sugar maple at the edge of the swamp near the sawmill — it always stood, reflected in the millpond, a flaming torch, an outrider of

winter, when all the other trees were green. She could see that, surely, and some spray of scarlet woodbine and a burning bush or two besides.

But, of course, really she couldn't — what with Bob and Robbie and the plaster villa, and Katherine with her plans all made to come down in February with little Kate and Charlie. It would be lovely to have them there, to be all together again. Christopher could come, too, perhaps. Extricate himself for a brief two weeks from the demands of his architect's office and the more tenacious toils of his Cora.

Lovely to have that big family all under one roof, to be surrounded by your own. But she did hope that Katherine's nurse was going to agree with Lily's. Subscribe, at least, to the same general school of thought on diet and routine. That awful winter, two years ago, which really, in retrospect, had seemed to resolve itself into just one long argument as to what hour you lunched your three-year-old and whether or no the spinach should be strained! Well, they were darlings, the grandchildren, worth all the argument and all the nurses. Weren't they just what she supremely needed now? Gay little grandchildren, tumbling about under the ridiculous palm trees, too young ever to have been disappointing. How blessed, after all, to have nothing worse to worry about concerning *them*, at least, than the straining of spinach!

Home again. The motor was stopping. She arose

with decision. The game must be played now, even before Sands and Benton. Strange to come back, to enter that familiar door, so different a woman from the one that had left it a brief two hours ago. Ah, there was the clean door curtain behind the iron grill. Good Heavens! She was giving an opera party! She had quite forgotten. In a few minutes too. The street was quite dark. The street lights were blooming palely on their tall standards. She must have been ever so long at the doctor's. She hurried by Sands, oblivious of his veiled concern. Quite lightly she ran up her elliptical stair. The lamps were lighted in her rose-curtained bedroom. Her black chiffon evening gown lay stretched in readiness on the bed. She tossed her furs on the chaise-longue, dropped her wraps beside them, rang for her maid, stepped into her white-tiled bathroom to turn on her hot tub. She had to hurry. But she was glad of that. It would keep her from thinking. Preserve the numb, trancelike feeling that was keeping her, perhaps, from a breakdown. Thought could come later.

'I'll wear *all* my pearls,' she reflected with bravado. 'And, yes, I'll give Katherine the diamond chain tonight. I'd like to see her wear it. She knows I can't, in mourning. She won't think it queer.' She must make a list of her possessions. She had always meant to. The big pearls for Katherine, of course. The little ones for little Kate. Something for Lily. Yes, she wanted Lily to have something. But she'd give it to

her next week when they took Robbie. Not wait, lugubriously, until — the fall. That ruby pin that Sam gave her on their silver-wedding day. That would be just the thing. It was lovely and, somehow, the irony of handing on to Lily, little broken Lily, a silver-wedding present rather pleased her. It would serve as a subtle reminder of the lifelong loyalties of which the sterner stuff of a previous generation had been capable. For surely every marriage, in every generation, was strained, was threatened by the ups and downs of living. The pin matched, too, that absurdly huge ruby engagement ring which Lily had tried to return to Bobby and which he, quite properly, had refused to accept. Katherine said she wore it still sometimes. 'On her right hand, of course,' Katherine, arbiter of the conventions, had gravely added.

'I'm going to rouge to-night — rouge like a flapper!' thought Kate with determination. Yes, and try the little unused lipstick in the gold vanity case that Christopher, laughing lightly, had given her at Christmas. The effect was splendid, she thought, smiling, actually smiling, into her own blue eyes in her mirror. Really, in a pink light, with *all* the pearls, she didn't look a day over — well, forty-nine! Gray, of course, awfully gray. But women turned gray early now. Look at Christopher's Cora, still in the early thirties she was, and yet her little bobbed head was frosted all over like a silver thistledown. So festal and fantastic it always looked, an artifice, like fancy dress, so pro-

vocatively out of keeping with the almost childish contours of her little face, the youthful appeal in her blue, dancing eyes. Lovely, Cora, of course, every one thought so, pink and blue and white like a Dresden shepherdess and war-widowed and blameless, but seven years older than Christopher, after all. And not at all the sort of woman, with all her soft sophistication, to do for Christopher, sybaritic Christopher, capable, so perversely, of everything or nothing, all that yet remained to be done.

Kate rose. She looked pretty to-night. Really she did. Nice to look nice on this, of all evenings. It helped the morale absurdly. And Raymond was coming. Fred, too, curiously enough, but that was neither here nor there. Strange how still, at fifty-nine, the spark of coquetry in her heart flashed inevitably into flame at the sight, at the thought, of Raymond. Women were queer. Kittle-cattle, the best of them. Twenty-five years she'd spent indomitably endeavoring to forget Raymond, indomitably endeavoring to make him remember her! Ridiculous. Futile on the one hand, unnecessary on the other. Impossible, of course, that she could ever forget, or he not remember. They'd taken it hard, the two of them, thank goodness. She hadn't, at least, on her conscience the idle romance of an empty summer, the vulgarity of futile philandering — in retrospect so trivial and tarnished and trite. For to have felt like that, ever, about any one and then to have forgotten

— that would have been the worst of all humiliations. That would have shaken the foundations of everything.

Loving couldn't hurt you. Loving any one. Only what you did about it. Loving ought always to help. How passionately she'd tried to explain that to Raymond. Had he ended by understanding? Had she understood, really, herself? What you did about it counted in one way, supremely. It showed you up. But in another, more spiritual sense, did it matter really at all? Hadn't she felt from the moment that she'd faced the fact of her feeling for Raymond that she'd thrown her cap over the windmill? She hadn't run off with him — but, oh, how she'd wanted to! It was the wanting to that counted, that surge of emotion that had made her, in his arms for that moment, in that moonlit garden, horribly, ecstatically, his, not Sammy's. When she knew that she'd like to, she'd crossed the Rubicon. A flaming sentence of de Maupassant had flashed into her mind at the moment, 'Voilà, je suis une femme perdue!' And she had been, really, for all that she'd stayed in the traces. The quality of the emotion. That was the thing that counted.

'Mother?' It was Katherine's voice on the stairway. 'You're late.' It was Katherine's disapproving presence in the door. Handsome, wholesome Katherine, charming in silver brocade.

'No, dear. You're early. I'm so glad.' Kate kissed

her pink cheek. 'I want to give you this. I'll never wear it again. I'd like you to have it.'

'Why, m*other!* Mother, how lovely!' Katherine's tranquil face beamed with delight. 'How sweet of you! How darling!' No awkward questions. No vain surmising. Wonderful how easy at times, if how difficult at others, a lack of imagination in your offspring did make things! 'Come down and show Charles. He'll be *so* pleased.'

Kate slipped her arm around Katherine's slim waistline. How lithe the firm young muscles felt beneath the soft silken drapery! How adorable the three small freckles were that always lasted over from the tennis courts of summer to those of Florida on Katherine's determined little nose! How lovely to be young! How lovely to have the young about you! Strange what it did to her just to look at Katherine, catch the reassuring practicality of her matter-of-fact little mind. It made the visit to the doctor seem just a bad dream. It couldn't be true. Not when she and Katherine, in spite of the devastation of that revelation, could be together, so exactly, the same.

Charles was in the drawing-room under Sam's portrait. Charles in his early thirties, immaculate in evening dress, courteously awaiting her permission to smoke, so safe, so sane. Really so good-looking, if a forehead heightened above the temples and a rounded waistline *did* prophesy, direly, what he would some day, not so far off, become.

Sam's portrait looking down on them. Sargent had so enjoyed that portrait. And Kate, after a loyal moment of vague alarm, had so enjoyed his enjoyment! Sam looking like Daniel Webster, awfully New England, indomitably Vermont, lean and distinguished — yet somehow so laughably prosperous. That faint gold high light that was his Phi Beta Kappa key dangling ironically on the well-cut waistcoat. How had Sargent done it? Made you know that suit was so new, that chair so luxurious, that imposing façade, seen dimly in the background, nothing more exalted than an apotheosis of a stock exchange? Kate had almost expected him to sketch in a family Bible, dominated by a ticker, on the table at Sam's elbow. Had resolved to protest if he did. But he didn't — nothing so crude! 'Transplanted,' she'd always called it in private.

A step on the stair. Here were Fred and Ida. Fat, funny Ida, ridiculously poured into the purple sheen of that Poiret model! Always the same, perennially youthful, triumphantly rising, by sheer force of gayety, above the devastating ravages of time. Irrepressible Ida, silencing Fred, silencing the roomful by the clamor of her entrance! Good gracious! Had Ida, ever so delicately, begun to touch up her raven hair? Wasn't there just a glint of henna? Or was it the light? Cheerful old Ida, jollying Charles, who wasn't too easy to jolly!

How mean of her to notice! Thoughts were wicked.

You couldn't control them. Thoughts were like naughty children. Indecent! Rebellious! They noticed everything and blurted right out to you so much that you'd rather never have known! Fred looked blooming, chatting with Katherine. Good old friends! She felt her spirits rising. She loved a party. Why, it *couldn't* be true — the doctor's revelation. Not when just the sight of Fred and Ida could so snap her out of her gloom.

Here was Sands with the cocktails. The vermouth *had* lasted. And a riot on the stairs that could only mean that the boys were coming down from their rooms on the third story for their engagements of the evening. Bob in the doorway, bluff, blond, and a little heavy, still in his tweeds, bound for some place, Kate thought helplessly, that it were better he stayed home from. Christopher behind him, tall and dark and slim, a gardenia in the buttonhole, just a shade too much the dandy, a bit *too* Valentino, in evening dress. She knew where *he* was off to!

They clustered about the cocktails. Clustered about Ida, laughing, joking, giving her a whirl. Nice boys, both of them. Sweet with older people. Fond of each other. Fond of Katherine. The family would hang together. Not disintegrate, like so many, with the passing of the older generation. Bob would have help, always. If he'd only take it.

She turned quickly. Raymond was at her elbow. Raymond smiling down at her with that little look

behind a look that had lingered so touchingly for the last quarter-century in his quiet, appraising eyes. She smiled back at him. Let him see for a moment that she thought it touching. That she was touched. Why not, this evening? When she had such a funny feeling of looking at her life as a finished story. This, incredibly, was the last chapter. Here, with her old friends, and the children, and Raymond. This was where she was, so beautifully, at the end.

Sands announcing dinner. Katherine murmuring impatiently that Galli-Curci was singing. The boys taking their uproarious departure. The little party proceeding gayly under the crystal chandelier through the Georgian corridor, irrepressible Ida calling something naughty and noisy over the bannisters to the boys.

Kate cast an appraising eye over her dinner table. Charming, as always. Sands had a gift with flowers. Tall candelabra, creamy Wedgwood, Victorian glass, ornately cut, that somehow she could never bear to abandon for the brilliant modern fashion of garish color. She remembered too well the day she had picked it out, some thirty years ago, in quite a little flutter of excitement at the thought that it was quite all right — that Sam was now, incredibly, in a position to pay for all those glittering dozens.

Fred at her right hand, unfolding his napkin. Charles at her left. Raymond opposite, where she could look at him across the candle-light. Funny,

that to-night of all nights, he and Fred should both be there. They often were, of course. She'd never thought before how odd it was, representing, as they did, the lives she might have chosen. Fred, now, of course, never remembered. Forty years ago! Why should he? And certainly she'd never stretched out her hand to prevent *him* from forgetting anything it was more comfortable not to recall!

Fred was telling them the last political scandal. Charles was deeply interested. Something about the municipal slush fund. Fred was dabbling in politics these latter years. Some thought, with his millions, he'd end in the Senate. Probably he would if these slush fund investigations didn't become too personal. How Ida would love it! She loved to be grand.

Fred would never seem grander, however, even under the dome of the Capitol, than he had the day she first saw him, forty years ago on a Vermont hillside. He'd come home from Dartmouth with Sammy for a Christmas vacation of winter sports. Twenty-one, the boys were, and she just nineteen, and already half in love with Sammy, who was so wholly in love with her. Fred thought she was lovely. Really he did. It was love at first sight. And she, she was awfully flattered. A man from Chicago, forty years ago in that remote village, might as well have been a man from Mars! A young Lochinvar had come out of the West, like a fairy tale, like a ballad.

What a fortnight they'd had on the hills and the

millpond, among the Vermont snowdrifts. And what a wooing had followed! Flowers and books and boxes of candy, all the way from Boston! But somehow that was just what put her off him. He seemed so alien, so prosperous, so remote from the thrifty Vermont life she knew so well. Those years with her father in that little white house on Main Street. Those sacred duties of domesticity, the dusting and sweeping, the bedmaking, and baking, the washing of her grandmother's Lowestoft teacups in the sink by the kitchen pump. The reading of the Concord philosophers around the family lamp in the evening. The Emersonian tradition, her father had called it.

She'd really taken Sammy because he was threadbare. A minister's son who had never betrayed to her, all those five years that they waited to marry, the slightest ambition to rise above a local law practice. It was on Fred's suggestion, when Bobby was two years old, that Sam had decided to move West. How good they had been to them, Fred and Ida, when first they were settled in that little South Side boarding-house, Sam so busy and she with Bobby, and Katherine coming. She'd loved Ida at once. Almost at once. For, at the first glance, even at twenty-eight, Ida had seemed excessively — well, un-Vermont!

The mushroom soup had been good. Was the filet a little below par? Sands *was* rushing them through. He had such a conscience about the opera. Just like Katherine! Good Lord! How politics bored her! But

she didn't have to talk. Not even to listen. Fred was quite happy with Charles for an audience. And Ida hadn't yet given either Raymond or Katherine a chance to utter a word. How she could keep it up! But always amusing. Amusing Raymond this minute. Amusing him awfully. Lovely looking, Raymond, Kate thought, across the candle-light, with that cameo profile, worn now like old ivory, and that ethereal expression of the spirit shining through. A head from some Greek coin, poised with what flaming distinction on his thin professorial shoulders. A pagan head in repose. It was the smile that was spiritual.

Had she ruined his life? Her passion for understatement, that was Vermont in its essence, mocked at the melodrama of that conventional phrase. Lives weren't ruined by others. Struggling even with love and renunciation, it was up to you to make or mar your own. His gray hair looked so blond in the candle-light. The same little ripple above his ear. Just as it did that summer. Men *didn't* change like women. Life *didn't* play its grotesque jokes on them.

Kate viewed her salad with distaste. That alligator pear wasn't an entirely happy thought on the cook's part. She'd have to live on them for three months in Florida. Horrid things, tasting just like soap, with a little French dressing! But Katherine loved them. She'd forgotten Galli-Curci in the pleasure of lingering. It was distressing Sands. Ah, here was the ice.

And Katherine masterfully suggesting, 'Let's have coffee at the table, Mother.' They would. It was 'Traviata.' She loved a good old hurdy-gurdy opera. And 'Traviata' was the best of all.

Katherine *did* have the bit in her teeth this evening. Why, she hardly gave Ida time to finish her gold-tipped cigarette, under the disapproving stare of Sam's portrait. Like Sam himself, under the discipline of the younger generation, that portrait must countenance much that it could not entirely condone. Cigars for the men were obviously out of the question. Kate could imagine Fred relinquishing his with a sigh! In a moment, almost, Katherine had marshaled them all into the Georgian entry. 'Galli-Curci is singing,' she was explaining with the sweet reasonableness that Katherine's family, at least, knew was not to be gainsaid.

Ida was gorgeous in ermine. Raymond just a thought shabby in his threadbare ulster. Curious, thought Kate, as she descended her icy steps once more, clinging gratefully to his elbow, the power that a shiny coatsleeve had to stir her heart. Sparsely and sparely she should have lived her life. Sam had betrayed her by turning everything to gold. Forty years ago, compared to Fred, how out-at-elbows he'd looked. But that latent Midas touch of his had made them as like as two peas in the end.

The motor was waiting. The motor would be crowded. No, Fred, ignoring all protests, was climbing

up beside Benton. Kate shrewdly suspected him of having salvaged that cigar. Nice to sink down in the darkness, in the crack beside Ida. Tired she felt, awfully. But all evening, no pain. That was excitement. Wonderful really how she was carrying it off. But she'd close her eyes now for a moment. If Raymond *did* see in the light of a street lamp. Raymond would guess, Raymond would know, of course, before any one. Before even Christopher.

It would be frightful for Raymond. She understood. The last curtain on his personal drama. The passing of romance. Marvelous, unbelievable, to have meant all that to him. From the day they first met, when she was so conscientiously showing the children the starfish in the Marine Laboratory at Woods Hole. What a Greek god he'd looked to her, the slim young zoölogist they'd surprised at his microscope! And so charming, so eager, so endearingly threadbare! From Chicago too. How funny they'd never met. Of course she didn't know many University people. Stupid of her not to! What a summer had followed. Sam back in Chicago, making — it must have been about his third million. How guilelessly they'd slipped into it, without thought or foreboding, through happy companionship, through books and talk and laughter.

Why, the children were there every minute, on the beach, in the garden. She could see them now, Bob in his last sailor suits, Katherine with her fat pigtails,

Christopher, funny little black-headed mite, trotting about in his yellow rompers. Raymond at her elbow, clever, companionable, never alarming, just being, ever so enchantingly — well, just what he was! How aghast they both were at the final revelation! How they'd tried to ignore it, deny it, leave it unspoken! How bewildered by what was for both of them a shattering awakening, to the devastating complexity of life!

Well, here was the opera. Charles was being effective with the tickets. They were late. No crowd. Just the straggling box-owners. And the first trills of the aria closing the first act as they ascended the stairs. An obsequious usher, pulling a red velvet curtain. The darkened auditorium. Ida rustling to her seat. Katherine sinking reproachfully into hers. The brilliant stage. The little figure that was Galli-Curci alone, well up by the footlights, the familiar crinoline, the festooned camellias, the golden voice.

The curtain descended. The prima donna took her encores. The fat little tenor showed up to share the glory. Katherine murmured forgivingly, 'You shouldn't have had salad.' The lights flashed up. The horseshoe was half empty, boxes slowly filling. Katherine was right, as usual, if a little insistent. Lovely the opera. Disgusting of people not to prefer it to food! Light chatter from her dinner party. Ida nodding and becking, calling her jocosities to the adja-

cent boxes. Fred talking critically of the management's deficit. Gloomily prophesying that they would call on the guarantors for one hundred per cent. Charles being practical and sagacious. 'What opera needs everywhere is fewer artists and better salesmen. A good business man at the head to sell it to the community at cost.' How funny! How familiar! The Chicago capitalist, affable, affluent, open-handed, but a bit bewildered, stonily confronting an art.

The curtain was rising. The familiar garden. The great second act of 'Traviata.' The one she always loved. Kate settled herself in her seat with a little sigh of pleasure at the opening bars of the orchestra. She could feel Raymond's eyes upon her in the darkness. How lovely to have him there! The story proceeded. Love among the roses. The tenor departed. The father appeared, a figure of doom and foreboding, at the garden gate.

Well, she was a little on his side, reflected Kate, with humor and a thought for Christopher and Cora. Life wasn't as simple as opera. She pictured herself advancing, to measured music, upon Cora in her little French parlor, pleading in a burst of irresistible melody for Christopher's salvation. Too bad it just wasn't done. For she felt she could quite throw herself into the rôle!

Ah, but now, she was all for the lovers! The great duet was over. Galli-Curci, willowy in her billowing

ruffles, had waved the father off into the wings, had turned, all set for sacrifice, toward the inkpot and the fatal, feathered quill. That voice, that music, that agony of renunciation! Didn't she know? Didn't she understand? Hadn't she been through it all that summer night, in her little seaside bedroom, at Woods Hole? She remembered now how her little ivory pen, rusted by the damp sea-breezes, had spluttered as she wrote those broken words to Raymond of passion and farewell.

Of course, after that evening in his arms in the garden, that never-to-be-forgotten evening of promises and protestation, she hadn't just clapped on a picture hat and rushed off in distraction under an arch of roses. Life wasn't like that. No, she had gone up to her rooms in a dumb, trancelike ecstasy of emotion. The joy of loving and being loved had built a wall around her, as if by enchantment, through which she felt no other thought, no other consideration, could ever possibly break. And there in her room was Katherine, brown, plump, little Katherine, five-year-old Katherine, sleeping hot and damp and tumbled, her brown hair straggling over the pillow, her little freckled nose wrinkling adorably as she wriggled in the sudden flood of light. And just beyond the flimsy door was Bobby. And Christopher, sleeping with old Sadie, across the hall.

Frightful, unfair, life, to put such choices up to a woman. To choose between two men! Why, that

was easy! Sam didn't figure in her consideration at all that evening. He'd played the game and lost. That was quite simple. All sympathy for Sam, in the turn events had taken, was overwhelmed by the flood of pity that surged up for Raymond at the very thought that they could possibly have taken any other. But to choose between Raymond and the children! Why, it was inconceivable! There was no common unit of measure in the human heart to weigh such different loyalties. Then suddenly in the turmoil conviction came to her. There *was* no choice. Not for her, at any rate. You were as God made you. The children were helpless. And they were her life.

No, she hadn't clapped on a picture hat and rushed off in distraction. Nothing so easy. She had waked up Sadie, incredulous Sadie, and briefly informed her that they were leaving by the early morning train. Had packed five trunks, wrapped up the books from the circulating library, written the laundry to send on the wash, the post office to forward the mail. And then in a dream, a nightmare, had sat down at quite four in the morning to write to Raymond the little there was to write. Sadie had given notice next week in Chicago. From the moment of that midnight awakening, Kate knew, conscientious Sadie had always considered her completely unbalanced.

The curtain was falling. Fred and Charles were quietly absconding, murmuring vain words about a cigar. Woman's proverbial intuition sensed a hip

flask somewhere about them. New men appeared around the crimson curtain. Katherine's contemporaries, clustering gayly about her. Ida monopolizing them. Raymond saying gently, 'You're tired tonight, Kate. Why not leave early?' She shook her head reassuringly. Why, she never felt better. Darkness fell on Raymond's incredulity.

The lighted stage again. The act she never cared so much for. Gay, though. Brilliant, hurdy-gurdy Verdi. But the vindictive frenzy of the Italian tenor always seemed a little stagey, a trifle absurd. Men weren't like that. Or were they? Not her men, anyway. Fred and Sam and Raymond. Perfect, all of them, always. Raymond was wonderful. Why had he cherished no resentment. Raymond had no children. How *could* he understand? Raymond understood everything. Without words. Without warning. Raymond was infallible. He sensed the finest distinctions. The most ephemeral thought. How had he known enough, since Sam's death, never to have pressed a marriage? To feel with her that people such as they, who had loved and lost with such tragic desperation in the early thirties, didn't marry, grotesquely, at fifty-nine. Marry, absurdly, surrounded by incredulous offspring and bouncing grandchildren. Accept as mendicants, from the condescending hands of Destiny, something so much less good than they could have taken for themselves. No, Raymond's dramatic sense for living equaled her own. For him,

too, was quite impossible a ridiculous anticlimax to that early dream.

The act was wearing on. The insult had been given. The lady of the camellias was swooning in the arms of her confidant, the familiar strains of the most famous of all the arias was floating through the vast upper reaches of the old Auditorium to heaven's gates. Fred and Charles were returning to the box a little shame-facedly. A healthy masculine aroma of smoke and whisky clinging robustly about them. The curtain descended.

She *was* tired. Raymond was right. The clamor of the intermission annoyed her, making demands upon her superficial attention. Short, though, always, this last one. As soon as the curtain calls were over, the curtain was rising. Leaving her again, alone with thought, in the grateful dark. The stage was set for tragedy. The dimlit bedroom, the bed in the alcove, the chaise-longue and soft velvet mantle waiting by the fire for the last duet. Nothing left now for the broken heroine, draped in white chiffon, but to die in the arms of her repentant lover.

Curious that she didn't want to die in Raymond's. But she didn't. Didn't want him to connect her with the sordid incapacities of illness, the absorbing egoism of pain. Better, how much better, to fade away like a shadow, pass, imperceptibly, with no rude shock of actuality, from a dream to a memory. Be for Raymond, always, the woman in the doorway, the

figure on the threshold of something he could not attain.

Too tired she was, too, for death scenes and protestations. The children and Raymond, the weariness of thinking and planning and worrying for others! How she'd like to evade it all! Slip away to the austerity of that Vermont village, with the comforting reflection that her life, for others, was over. That there was nothing she could be expected to do about it now. She'd like to be buried there, beside the little white church, whose spotless steeple, ignoring the compromising complexities of life, pointed an undeviating path to heaven from that granite hill.

But no, she'd have to lie beside Sam, of course, in the marble mausoleum in Graceland, under the shadow of the elevated railway, with the sound of the Clark Street trolley, if it were not mercifully stifled in the silence of eternity, forever in her ears. Funeral wreaths, tuberoses, purple bows on doorbells. A funeral just like Sammy's, undoubtedly, if Katherine were planning it. Impossible, of course, even to ask for that little neglected grave on the hillside. Impossible to lie forever, under waving grasses, with only the gentle companionship of sun and wind and rain.

The curtain was falling on Galli-Curci's still white figure, on the sympathetic shadows of father, maid, and doctor, on the little tenor's frantic impersonation of despair. The audience was stirring, applause lost

in movement, lights flashing on, the box party coming to life. Ida growing voluble, Katherine articulate, the men ducking for overcoats. Raymond placed her evening wrap about her shoulders and Kate leaned a moment, tenderly, against his encircling arm. But before her eyes still rose the familiar slope of that pine-clad hillside, tranquil under the purity of New England sky. Not even Raymond's touch, Raymond's eyes could, at that moment, quite recall her from that inner vision.

The October sun was shining brightly down on the little group of mourners, as Katherine, draped in impeccable black, her little pink face flushed and swollen with tears, turned from the wreath-decked door of the marble mausoleum and preceded Charles and her brothers into the family limousine. Cora, in mourning, maintaining every standard set for a daughter-in-law, was already seated there. Charles and Christopher solemnly followed them. Bob would sit outside, with a sustaining cigarette, at Benton's elbow.

'Don't the flowers look lovely?' said Katherine, with a last sad glance from the window. 'Wasn't the church beautiful? Just as Mother would have liked to have it. And all of us around her. Oh, Cora, I'm so glad you hurried the wedding so that she could see it. I know it made her happy to feel Christopher was settled before she — went.'

'I hope it did.' Christopher's glance at Cora was a trifle equivocal. The tilt of Cora's eyebrow a bit ironic.

'Did you notice Lily?' she asked irrelevantly. 'She came up to the cemetery.'

Christopher cast an apprehensive glance at Bob's broad shoulder. But the glass was down. It was quite discreet.

'She looked awfully cut-up,' he said. 'In deep mourning.'

'Just black,' said Katherine absently. 'Her stockings were French nude.'

'No, dear.' Cora's voice was eager. 'You couldn't see through your veil. I noticed them particularly. They were black. That sheerest weight of evening chiffon.'

'Were they, really?' Katherine looked pleasurably excited. She, too, cast a glance, this time of calculating romance, at Bob's unconscious figure. 'She had on Mother's ruby. But that might have been sentiment. Why, Cora! I've just realized! She had Bob's engagement ring on her left hand!'

But Charles had no interest in the sentimental preoccupations of the eternal feminine.

'They keep this place up well,' he said, as they rolled decorously through the iron gates.

'Yes,' said Katherine practically. 'That's what you pay for. What they guarantee in their little booklet. I always like their phrase — perpetual care.

And it always makes me think of Mother. Just what she gave us. You know Mother never had a thought for herself. Funny to think of any one like Mother — never caring to have *any* life of her own.'

THE END

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